

# **BIBLICAL AND CONFESSIONAL** **VIEW OF MISSIONS**

Study Committee Report  
Recommended to the churches by  
Synod Escondido of the United Reformed Churches in North America  
2001

## **1. Articulation of the Biblical and confessional necessity and urgency for missions and for our involvement as churches.**

We begin by offering a biblical and confessional view of missions. In examining the Great Commission accounts of our Lord in the NT a number of things come to light.

Christian missions is the comprehensive sending activity of the sovereign triune God throughout the whole world, heralded through the preaching of the biblical gospel of repentance and remission of sins to the unconverted. Christian mission work will lead to spiritual reconciliation, resulting in the establishment and growth of the church, and the extension of the kingdom of God throughout the world. Christian missions is empowered by the Holy Spirit and will continue until Jesus comes again.

### **A. Christian Missions is the Comprehensive Sending Activity of the Sovereign Triune God**

God-ordained missions activity is comprehensive in the following ways:

1. All of the Persons of the Trinity are active in missions
2. It is universal in its scope
3. It is directed to all people
4. The whole church is to participate in missions
5. All what Christ has taught is to be obeyed
6. Christ's presence is promised to the end
7. Missions is completely dependent upon God, so we are always to pray

Matthew 28:16-20 affirms that the whole Trinity is involved in missions. The Father gives all authority for missions to the Son. The Son commissions the apostles. Baptism of the new converts is in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus commissions the church to make disciples among all peoples. All ethnic groups are welcome in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We call the churches to recognize the urgent need to evangelize the peoples all around us as well as to evangelize in all nations abroad (Acts 2; CD I. Art. 3).

The Great Commission includes the children of believers as disciples and recipients of water baptism and Christian instruction (Mt 28:20; Acts 2:37-39). We reject the notion that children of believers are not included in the covenant (CD I. Art. 17a).

Jesus entrusts us to teach the whole counsel of God. The church is to translate the Old and New Testament in the language of the peoples. Missionaries need to be trained in the doctrines of the whole counsel of God concerning God, man, salvation, the Savior, the church, ethics, missions, eternal life and related theological studies. We reject reducing the gospel to its bare

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minimum, but rather call on the church to send forth godly and biblically, theologically and ministerially trained missionaries who will, indeed, exalt the glorious name, words and deeds of God throughout the world (Ps 105:1-4; Phil 2:9-11).

### B. Christian Missions Will Be Accomplished Throughout the Whole World

Mark affirms that the gospel is to be preached to all peoples (Mk 16:15-16). The church is to continue her task despite persecutions and obstacles (Mt 10:19; John 15:20; 16:1-3). The example of the early church shows her zeal for this (Acts 8:1-4). The gospel of the kingdom of God will be preached in all nations prior to the return of Jesus (Mt 24:14).

### C. Christian Missions Will Herald the Good News Through the Preaching of Repentance and Remission of Sins to the Unconverted

Gospel preaching includes the call to repentance, that is, dying to sin, and the offer of the remission of sins, which is a complete forgiveness of our transgressions through faith in Jesus Christ (Lk 24:47). Gospel preaching is accompanied by the covenantal promise that those who believe will be saved and the curse that those who do not believe will be condemned (HC, LD 31; Q/A 84; Jn 20:23). There is a great need to evangelize and preach indiscriminately to the *unconverted*, pointing them to the crucified and resurrected Christ as the only way of salvation (John 14:6; CD II. 5).

### D. Christian Missions Leads to Spiritual Reconciliation, Resulting in the Establishment and Growth of the Church, and the Extension of the Kingdom of God Throughout the World.

The spiritual fruit of gospel proclamation is that sinners are reconciled to God, transformed to be saints and sent into the world to bear witness to the risen Lord (Acts 2:47; 5:14). God's people are to be incorporated into the church, the living body of Christ, in which His fullness dwells (Eph 1:23). Christ is building His church, as witnessed to by the prophets and apostles (Mt 16:18; Eph 2:20-21; II Pet 1:16-21; HC LD 21, Q/A 54).

### E. Christian Missions Is Accomplished Through the Church by the Empowerment of the Holy Spirit until Jesus Comes Again.

Christ mobilizes His church to extend into all nations (Acts 1:8; 2). The Father and the Son send the Spirit to enable the church to accomplish her missionary task. The church, mindful of her own inability and confessing God's ability, is called to pray continually for the work of missions (Luke 10:2; Rom 15:30-33; Eph 6:18-20; Acts 1:14).

Summary: We see, based upon scriptural teaching and our own churches' confessions, that the missionary task has been laid upon us as heirs to the apostolic mandate. We confess that we are to preach the gospel indiscriminately and promiscuously for it is only through this preaching that the elect will be gathered in. It is a biblical necessity that the church be strongly missionary minded. It is an urgent task, for there is no other way of salvation than in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

**2. This portion of our report deals with part (b) of the Synodical mandate. It will address the following points: (A) An articulation of the Biblical teaching**

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**concerning the church as the agent of missions, (B) The centrality of preaching for the advancement of missions, and (C) The responsibility of every member of the congregation towards missions in the office of believer.**

### A. The Church as the agent of missions

By missions, we understand: The Church's official engagement in the proclamation of the completed work of Christ to the unconverted, in response to Christ's mandate that His Church be His witness in and to the world, through its commissioned officers, in reliance upon the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit who applies that completed work to the heart and soul of the sinner, wherein the unconverted is compelled to render obedience to the self-revealed Triune God, who in Christ summons the sinner to faith and repentance, and graciously offers him unmerited salvation and reconciliation.

From this definition, the following observations follow: (a) The Church of Jesus Christ must of necessity function as the proper and sole agent of missions. (b) The Church enters the mission field in an official capacity. Our involvement here is not as a spectator, nor as a contributing participant, but as the engineers following the Chief Architect's design in building the structure. (c) Christ is both the *author* and the *content* of missions. The missionary does not simply offer the benefits of Christ, nor merely speak about Christ, but presents Christ Himself as revealed in Scripture to the sinner. (d) It is Christ who sends out His servants to be His heralds in the world (cf. Mt 28: 18-20; Acts 9:15; 1 Cor 1:17, 4:1-2, 9:16-17; 1 Th. 2:4, 11-13). (e) It is clear that missions will not succeed if the Holy Spirit is not its driving force (Acts 1:8; 13:9; 16:6-7; CD III&IV: 11). (f) The Church, in engaging in missions, is privileged to participate in a cooperative – God-initiated, defined, and controlled – enterprise whereby Christ is pleased to use the meager and finite efforts of His Church as the official instrument of missions (cf. 1 Cor 3:9; 1 Thes 3:2).

The Bible – both prescriptively and descriptively – insists that the work of missions not only belongs to the Church of Christ, but also should only be conducted by those who have been commissioned as officers in His Church. In Acts 1:8, Christ enjoined the task of being His witnesses to those who were called and commissioned by Him for that very task. In Samaria, Philip represented the Church in an official capacity, and labored accordingly. Upon hearing that a church was planted in Samaria, the apostles officially dispatched Peter and John to investigate (Acts 8:14ff). The congregation at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4) gives an even more vivid and insightful picture of how the early Church understood and conducted missions. Here, it is evident that the five men mentioned were office bearers in that congregation. They were consecrated to their offices and were thus instruments of the Lord. The Holy Spirit commissioned Saul and Barnabas from among them to go to the mission field, through the officers of that congregation (v.3). Saul and Barnabas would be accountable to that congregation (Acts 14:26-28, 15: 30-35, 18:22-23), and to the one in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-5, 21:17-19), with which Antioch apparently enjoyed shared oversight of the mission field.

The Church's calling to do missions is also seen in the fact that it is the sole custodian of heaven's message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20), and of the keys of the Kingdom (Mt 16:18-19; 18:18). Therefore, it functions as God's ambassador in the world, representing the diplomatic affairs of His Kingdom. The Church alone has been given the task of summoning the lost to repentance. Not only has it been given the mandate to do missions, but also the manner in which to do it. Such a task does not belong merely to a group within the Church that operates outside or independent of the Church's authority, such as boards or groups of well-intentioned but non-commissioned individuals. Elders must exercise direct oversight over the mission field as they do over an established congregation. A task so paramount may not be relegated

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anywhere else than where Christ Himself has placed it – in the hands and hearts of His officers in His Church, as our own *Church Order* affirms (Art. 47).

Finally, our definition of missions also suggests that theological institutions, e.g., Reformed seminaries, which prepare men to serve in the office of Minister of the Word and Sacraments must also adequately prepare them to be effective Reformed missionaries. The practical aspects of that training should include internships in actual mission fields under the supervision of an active Reformed missionary. The training of such prospective missionaries should include modern foreign languages in addition to the biblical ones. To that end, our Reformed seminaries are hereby encouraged to establish a missiological department.

In doing missions, therefore, the Church, by God's grace, seeks to outgrow its existing national and ethnic boundaries. It seeks to reproduce itself through extension and expansion by church planting, using as the primary vehicle the office of Minister of the Word and Sacraments. It avails itself of Christ's prescribed and God's procured means. These activities are not to be appended to the Church's overall mandate. They *are* part of its overall mandate.

### B. Preaching and Missions

No church program carries the same weight as the faithful preaching of the gospel. Christ has nowhere promised to produce the same results - namely the building up of His Church - through any other church program as He does through the preaching of His word. Therefore, no one may substitute or parallel the unique divinely ordained means for doing missions and expect the Bible's predicted result. No church can be built on any surer foundation than the pure and faithful preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is also the missionary's confidence. The preaching of the Gospel is God's power unto salvation (Ro 1:16); and it is the missionary's comfort (2 Cor 5:18-20).

The reason for the centrality of preaching is that in hearing the preacher, the sinner actually *hears* Christ Himself. Such is the promise of our Lord (Mt 10:20, 40; Lu 10:16; Jn 10:16), "[t]hey will listen to *my* voice" (emphasis added). See also Jn 13:20; 17:20. That belief was both the foundation and the confidence of Paul's preaching (Ro. 10:14 NASV; Eph. 4:21 NKJV; 1 The. 2:14). God makes His appeal directly to the sinner, through the preacher's message (2 Cor 5:18-20). A Reformed understanding and implementation of missions must therefore rest on the *centrality, sufficiency, efficiency, uniqueness, and authority* of preaching (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 21 and 31; CD I:3-4; II:5; III&IV:6-8,17).

### C. The Office of Believer - the involvement of every member of the congregation in missions

Although the Church's involvement in missions is to be conducted on an official and commissioned level, it would be a grave error to conclude that non-commissioned members of Christ's church are therefore excluded from participating. The New Testament is replete with examples of individuals who volunteered their time and gifts, and resources for the Kingdom (Luk. 19:29-34; 22:9-13; 23:50-56). During Paul's ministry we find even more participation from individual believers: those whose hospitality he enjoyed (Acts 16:14-15), his fellow travelers (Acts 19:29; 20:4) his fellow laborers (Rom. 16:3; Phil 4:2-3), and all the others who are typically mentioned at the close of most of his epistles. Those practices lead us to believe that there is ample room in missions for those who are not office bearers. They may be labelled "missionary helpers." There is ample room for individual service. In certain areas, the work of individuals, or independent organizations can be effectively incorporated alongside the institutional work of the Church.

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The following examples are some of the ways to assist the cause of missions on an individual basis:

- (1) The work of Christian mercy: Here the diaconate may seem most pertinent. Deacons should certainly acquaint themselves with the necessities common to the mission field and missionary households, whether that need be for equipment, personnel, finances, or otherwise. Although the office of the diaconate represents an official aspect of the Church, our deacons must avail themselves of the generosity and ability of individual Christians, and delegate appropriate responsibilities to their care. Our *Church Order* supports this view (Art.15).
- (2) Volunteering in Christian (mission) hospitals, or assisting in care-giving institutions has also been a means of bearing witness for Christ by individuals. Such opportunities may be wanting in rural or urban areas of North America, but are known to exist in other places where missionaries labor. These activities are an ideal means for Christians to exercise their gifts and promote the cause of missions.
- (3) Christian hospitality: This Christian behavior is not much practiced anymore. But it is also an important way of extending support to the cause of missions. The Bible admonishes us to that end (Heb. 13:2). When missionaries come into town, Christians should gladly offer their homes for the missionary's needs. In so doing, they will serve Christ and His cause. Ministers and elders should therefore encourage the flock to serve Christ in this way.
- (4) Correspondence with the missionary: The mission field can be a most discouraging place, especially in a day when the world grows more intolerant of Christ and His messengers. To missionaries who are thus situated, maintaining correspondence with caring Christians "back home" can have incalculable benefits, and will encourage them in their distresses. Likewise, we should make it a practice of keeping such people in our prayers, and inform the entire congregation of the work of our missionaries.
- (5) Doing missions locally: Increasingly it is becoming clear that the mission field is no longer "out there." That means the North American Christian now lives *in* the mission field. To take advantage of this new "Pentecost", Christians should be encouraged to invite their unbelieving friends and neighbors to attend worship services and other church related activities with them. The Samaritan woman had the right idea, and saw its glorious results (Jn 4:39-42).

### **3. An articulation of the proper relationship between "word" and "deed" in the mission of the churches.**

A. Introduction: In the early days of the New Testament church everything was growing rapidly and the Apostles were giving leadership to all aspects of the church's ministry. The Apostle's soon found that it was physically impossible to meet all of the needs of the church by themselves. So the church chose 7 men to assist them in meeting the material needs of the members, while the Apostle's continued to attend to the spiritual needs of the church. (Acts 6:1-4)

Such a ministry of "deed" was not new to the church. The Old Testament church was also commanded to remember the physical needs of the poor. (Lev 19:9-10)

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It was the command of the Lord to remember the poor (their poorer fellow believers in the Lord here in this context) and even those strangers (unbelievers) who were in their midst. The principle of extending mercy is not new for God's people, however, it unfolds in the New Testament in a different manner than in the Old.

In the Old Testament the people lived in the land and expressed mercy to the poor through their agricultural system. In the Apostolic Era the Jewish nation-state ceased to exist and the church was no longer characterized by geographical locale. The church began to spread across the entire world and now encompasses all peoples in all lands.

Appropriately then in the New Testament, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles of our Lord created an office in the church to carry forth, in an official manner, the work of Christian mercy. We call this office the diaconate. As a result there is now a mechanism within the church so that both the ministry of the word and the ministry of mercy could flourish together. The burden of this section is not to elucidate all of the possibilities for the deacons of a local congregation. The purpose is to investigate how preaching and the ministry of mercy should function together on a denominational level, especially in the context of missions.

### B. Definition of terms.

When speaking of "word" in this context we are referring to the public proclamation of the Word of God by those appointed to such tasks by the church; i.e. the preached word. "Deed" in this context is any organized work of mercy done in the name of Christ and his church. Any believer may practice private mercy and we are encouraged to do so to the glory of God (Matt. 5:16). But "deed" in this sense is a work of mercy done officially through the diaconate of the church.

The consideration of word and deed in this section is confined to the official actions of the churches in their pursuit of missions on a denominational level.

### C. The word - the one great task of the church.

As is developed in other parts of this report, discipling the nations through the preaching of the Word of God is the great commission of the church. The word must have preeminence in the mission of the church. The Apostles were loathe to wait on tables, not because "mercy" was beneath their station as apostles, but because preaching and prayer had to have a higher priority than even food distribution.

This is the pattern all through the apostolic missionary journeys. It was preaching, preaching, preaching which was the first priority. Paul and the others healed many, but it was secondary to preaching.

As we compare the accounts of Apostolic missionary activity revealed in the NT we see the following patterns: 1. There are instances of preaching where there is no record of diaconal deeds of mercy (Acts 2:14-39; 14:1-7). 2. There are instances of preaching and deeds of mercy practiced together by the Apostles (Acts 3, 14:8-18). 3. There are instances of preaching within the newly established churches and then diaconal activity arising from the new churches (Acts 14:21-22; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). What is striking is that there is no evidence that diaconal deeds of mercy were ever practiced independent of preaching.

### D. The relationship of word and deed.

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It is significant that the word and deed were extricably linked in apostolic missionary activity. Present missiological practice often divides word from deed, if not theoretically, then practically. So, for example, there are separate organizations for missions and for relief and development. And relief and development are often carried on irrespective of whether preaching is being accomplished or not. It is not even necessary to have an ordained minister upon the scene.

In fact, some governments forbid the preaching of the gospel in conjunction with humanitarian relief efforts. For example, following the earthquake in Turkey, Christians were allowed to bring relief efforts but were not allowed to preach openly. This does mean that it is inappropriate for the church to bring relief in such situations. The church may testify to the mercy of Christ through her deeds (cf. Mt 5:16). But such a situation should be considered abnormal and irregular. Such use of "deed" without "word" may be necessary in times of disaster relief, but surely should not be the normal practice in other types of deeds of mercy, like schools, hospitals, and development projects.

Compassion has parameters in the Bible. The church is obligated to mercy only within certain boundaries. The church needs to be merciful, but also has the mandate to uphold moral standards and to teach Christian virtues in the way she dispenses mercy.

Its first obligation is to recognize the need of its own fellow believers and to meet those needs.

Matthew 25:31-40

Jesus here is not endorsing a general feeding, clothing and prison ministry. He is rather talking about feeding, clothing and visiting "my brethren." It is the care of one believer to another believer that is in view here. This text is often misused to promote indiscriminate distribution to the poor of the world. It speaks only of believers.

The practice of the church was to be discriminating in their works of charity. They would not even accept all Christian widows for financial assistance. The family was to take care of their widows in the first instance. If that were not possible, then the church would step in. Even this only takes place if the widow was spiritually responsive to the church's teaching. See 1 Tim 5:3-16.

Paul speaks of collecting for the "saints at Jerusalem" (Ro 15:26). He also speaks of offerings that were collected for ministering to the saints (2 Cor 8:4; 9:1).

But what of sharing with unbelievers, as was commanded in the Old Testament and Gal 6:10? Galatians 6:10 is often cited as a text to prove that mercy should be extended to all people of the world without any preconditions.

But even in this text there are parameters. The household of faith is held up as the most important recipient of the good deeds of a believer. The "all men" is reduced by this statement to a lesser priority. So there is a place for mercy towards the unbeliever, but it comes after the needs of the believer are met. And this whole passage seems to be talking to local believers working and living on a local level.

The unbeliever living far away is not contemplated either here or in Lev 19:9-10. Does this mean that there should be no mercy shown to unbelievers who are far away? No, it does not. But for the principles that apply to that situation we should look to the passages in the Bible which deal with missionary activity. And these texts always portray word and deed going hand in hand.

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In summary, we affirm that the biblical example is:

Preaching first. Preaching and mercy together. No extension of mercy where there is no preaching allowed. (Though we recognize that it may be necessary to save life through emergency disaster relief even if preaching is not allowed.) "Deed" should be channeled through the local churches on the mission field if the cultural and maturity level of the local church permits it without undue harm to the church.

E. Development of such a relationship of word and deed on the denominational level.

The New Testament information we have for this type of situation is limited. It seems as if gifts for mercy were entrusted to the apostles and whomever the church appointed to help them administer the gifts (2 Cor 8:18-19).

This text is not a command but an example how the situation was handled. The analogous situation today would be this. Monies are collected from the local church. They are sent with a missionary preacher to be administered. Along with the missionary, the church chooses and sends men to help in this task. The gospel would be preached and mercy ministered at the same time.

Any long term missions of mercy (hospitals, clinics, experimental farms, schools, orphanages, etc. ) would be initially administered by the missionary minister and his helpers until such time as they come under the diaconal oversight of a faithful local church.

This view of the relationship of word and deed and the missionary task will necessitate all three of the offices in the church to be active in missions. Elders and deacons will have to be active in identifying diaconal needs on the mission fields of their missionaries. They will be called upon to supervise deeds of mercy and be active in recruiting capable individuals from their congregations and other sister churches to assist as helpers (both short and longer term). Through their deeds, influential and talented persons of many vocations can enhance the work of missionary preaching.

There will be need for young people and retirees and every age between. There will be need of doctors, teachers, mechanics, builders, and distributors of tracts and Bibles.

The deacons will need to evaluate how best to bring Christian mercy to bear. If there is the possibility of using other personnel and/or organizations besides their own missionary and helpers, then these personnel/organizations need to be evaluated. Can they be used without compromising the Reformed faith and preaching?

We must be resolute about maintaining the vital connection between word and deed, that the preaching of the Gospel may be adorned by acts of Christian kindness.

**4. An articulation of a proper Biblical balance between the responsibility of the "autonomous" local church for the carrying out of missions, on the one hand, and our federation responsibility toward cooperation, coordination and mutual encouragement on the other.**

A. Should we form a denominational mission board?

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One of the concerns we have as United Reformed Churches is the matter of boards. We believe it is incumbent on us to send out a new generation of Reformed missionaries, but how can we do this most effectively? One of our answers has been the establishment of local committees, i.e. a committee set up under a local consistory. The Lord has used this to the benefit of our present missionaries. It has also been a system that has involved the local church much more in missions. Yet we do not want to be independent of each other in our missions efforts.

We wish to maintain the local church and its consistory as the calling, sending and administrating body for the mission effort. This, however, needs to be done in cooperation, coordination, and with the encouragement of other churches. In other words, we desire to maintain the intimate relationship that the missionary has with his consistory and his church, while at the same time we would like to encourage the participation of sister churches in this effort. Therefore, rather than a denominational board, and pursuant to Church Order Art. 47b, we recommend the Joint Venture model of missions.

### **B. Proposal #1: The Joint Venture Model**

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**Sister Church Art. 47(b)**  
Sending Funds to Missionary through Calling Church  
Sending representation to calling church's missions committee

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**Calling Church Art. 47(a)**



Missionary working under the authority of the calling church



Missions Committee of the calling church  
Focusing on the work of the missionary.  
Advising the calling church on how best to proceed.  
Answerable to the calling church consistory



**Sister Church Art. 47(b)**  
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Sending representation to calling church's missions committee



**Sister Church Art. 47(b)**  
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## 1. The Local Church: The Sole Sending Agency

In light of the aforesaid, on the basis of Scripture, missions is properly the activity of Christ exercised through the local church, not para-church agencies or the synod. The local church is called to conduct missions through her officially commissioned officers. Here we are further instructed by the wisdom of our forefathers in the faith. A synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Synod of 1896, in calling our attention to the Great Commission, pointed out that the church as a whole does not baptize but only the locally instituted church. The synod does not disciple, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded" (An Introduction to the Science of Missions, J.H. Bavink, p.59-60). This echoes the pattern of the New Testament church where missions was the task and responsibility of the local church.

In the Joint Venture Model the missions committee is responsible to the consistory of the calling church. One church is the 'sending church' and a certain number of churches (usually in the same classis) serve as 'supporting churches.' This model, we believe, provides "the churches with the most appropriate means of assistance and encouragement for the missionary task" and at the same time enables us as churches to "assist each other in the support of their missionaries" (CO Art. 47).

We propose the Joint Venture Model for the following reasons:

Guidance and Coordination: It may be advisable, due to the sheer weight of responsibility, that the council organize a missions committee to serve the council under its authority. In a multitude of counselors one finds wisdom and guidance (Proverbs 15:22, 20:18, 24:6). We can also better organize and coordinate the assistance and support of our missionaries, in terms of developing mission policies and actions for the field, as well as sharing in the weight of the responsibility including financial costs.

Participation: This model provides a more "hands on" approach to missions. It should encourage closer and more direct relationships between churches and missionaries. There is a shared sense of responsibility in doing the work of missions. Second, direct involvement may stimulate a godly zeal for the cause of missions within these "several local churches." A federation-wide support tends to a more superficial, distant relationship between the churches and the missionary and does little to stimulate godly zeal for the cause of missions. Third, this also allows churches to participate who are unable to call and send a missionary due to financial considerations.

Stewardship: This model provides a more efficient use of resources such as time and hard-earned monies as it minimizes travel, accommodation and other expenditures which might otherwise be incurred.

Strengthened Relations: This enables the missionary more time during his furlough to minister at his home base, strengthen relations among the several local churches via reporting and representation work, and strengthen relations with his family.

Biblical Precedent: The Holy Spirit commissioned Saul and Barnabas from the congregation in Antioch to go to the mission field (Acts 13:1-3). They were accountable to this congregation (Acts 14:26-28) and also to the congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-5; 21:17-19).

Safe Guard: This safeguards the authority of the local sending church who has responsibility for the supervision of the field, including the raising and administration of necessary funds, as well as the oversight of their own missionary.

Prevention: This also prevents the committee from having a "life of its own." A committee is a group of people to which something has been committed by the council of the church. It does not have any reason for existence apart from the mandate of the local church council.

Avoiding Conflict: In the event that one of the cooperating churches calls and sends a missionary to the same field, the local church ultimately should be responsible for the supervision of the field. This may be necessary to avoid conflict. However, the cooperating church would have oversight over her missionary.

## 2. Composition of the Missions Committee in the Joint Venture Model

Ideally, the missions committee should be as follows:

- a. Equal representation on the missions committee from the several local cooperating churches for a defined term and appointed by the various councils of the cooperating churches.
- b. Representation might consist of members of council and members of the congregation. For example, it may be modeled after the following structure:

Chairman: from the council of the sending church supervising the field

Recording Secretary

Corresponding Secretary (takes care of correspondence with missionary and with supporting churches)

Treasurer

Liaison members from councils of supporting churches

- c. The Function of an Organized Missions Committee

The committee may assist the consistory in the following areas:

- choosing the fields
- establishing priorities
- establishing a budget
- defining the principles and standards by which the prospective missionaries will be evaluated
- encouraging prayer (Acts 1:14) by keeping the congregation aware
- encouraging missionary zeal in the congregation by way of education and hands on involvement opportunities with the missionary. This will help inspire future missionaries among us.
- informing each consistory of the missionary's progress, successes, challenges and prayer needs

- d. The Benefits of an Organized Missions Committee

- order and establishment of guidelines which assist in smooth functioning
- help in handling quickly the myriad of requests for assistance

We must be clear in our understanding that the work of the missions committee is just that --- the work of a committee --- and functions as an advisory body under the supervision and authority of the council of the local sending church.

### 3. The Recruitment of Missionaries

As consistories decide to support missionaries they should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- a. Take special care in seeking out Spirit-filled, able men in our own congregations, training them with a view to ordaining and sending these men as missionaries into the mission field. It is absolutely improper to use untrained missionaries. Missionary work is exceedingly exacting and requires deep insight and knowledge. The mistakes made by missionaries are often still visible after centuries. As churches we should keep in mind, the following:
  - i) Call ministers of the Word and Sacraments to be sent as missionaries
  - ii) Send missionary helpers to assist them (for example, nurses, teachers, pilots, mechanics, etc.)
  - iii) Seek out specialized training, in addition to seminary, as need requires (language training, cross-cultural training, internships)
- b. Bear in mind, the apostolic pattern of sending out missionaries two by two, a pattern which is exemplified throughout the Gospels and the Book of Acts.
- c. Ensure the sending of and support for faithful missionaries. Just as we do not ordain men to be pastors of our churches, unless they subscribe with deep conviction to the Three Forms of Unity, so we should not send or support missionaries to the field who do not have this self-same sterling quality. If, in the event we should support missionaries outside of our federation or even foreign nationals, our rigorous theological standards ought to be the same for them as they are for pastors and missionaries in our own churches.

### 4. The Local Church and the Broader Assemblies

- a. In order to promote awareness of our missionary task as churches and stimulate our involvement in missionary work, we would propose that our calling churches and/or missionaries regularly give oral and/or written reports on missionary activity at classis and at synod. This is in accord with the apostolic pattern in the New Testament (Acts 14:26-27; 15:3-4; 18:22; 21:19-20).
- b. Not only is it our duty to promote and motivate but also to inform our churches on the federational level of the different fields of labor and recruitment for more missionaries as the need arises.
- c. If an urgent need for prayer or support arises in a particular field, the sending church is encouraged to correspond with the other member churches in the federation in order to make this need known. The councils then are encouraged to place an announcement of the same in the church bulletin and encourage a corresponding action from their members. If large amounts of monies or supplies are to be sent, it is advisable that diaconates appoint faithful men to go and oversee their use.

### C. Proposal #2: Missions Update

Pursuant to Section D of the synodical mandate that there be an articulation between

autonomous local churches and our federational responsibility for the cooperation, coordination and mutual encouragement of missions, and pursuant to Church Order Article 47b, we, the synodical committee, propose the following: That the URC publish a denominational semi-annual missions update.

Grounds: The printed page unites, informs and solidifies people of a common goal, as evidenced by the use of the printed page in the Reformation.

Means:

- 1) Each Joint Venture missions committee shall forward its missions reports (see proposal 1) to the editor.
- 2) The editor shall see that the publisher obtain the edited and collated reports.
- 3) The editor shall take care that the consistories obtain the published update. The consistories shall then distribute it among its members.

#### D. Stimulation of Godly Zeal for the Cause of Missions

Cultivating a proper motivation and participation for missions must be bolstered through pastoral exhortation, and be demonstrated in the way funds are appropriated for missions, in the way the work of missions, missionaries, their families, and their fields, are brought before the Lord in public prayers during worship, and, in the way the work of missions is accentuated through preaching and specific applicatory challenges. Young people should especially be encouraged to participate in the work of missions to the extent that they are able (e.g., clerical duties, fundraising activities, prayer, summer missions trips, and correspondence with missionaries).

1. The Primacy of the Pulpit. We confess that the preaching of the Word is the primary means of grace and that God creates and strengthens our faith through the preaching of the Word (HC Q/A 84). It follows therefore, that the stimulation of godly zeal for the cause of missions will come from a heartfelt response of obedience to the claims of Christ from the pulpit. Certainly as we know the depth of our sin and the richness of our salvation, this will prompt the covenant community as a whole to a holy zeal for the glory of God and the cause of His Kingdom in this world. Practically, however, men must be regularly challenged to consider seriously the call to the mission field. With great expectation, the elders should be ready to recruit able Spirit-filled men from the congregation. The stimulation of godly zeal for the cause of missions ought first to be evident in the pulpit and in the officebearers (cf. Eph 4:1-16).

2. Elder Direction. Elders in their home visits should encourage all believers to invite their unbelieving friends and neighbors to attend worship services and other church-related activities with them. The Samaritan woman had the right response, and saw the glorious results (Jn 4:39-42).

3. The Role of Prayer . The role of prayer cannot be underscored enough. Godly zeal for the cause of missions ought also to be evident in our public and private prayers. We are called to pray for our missionaries and the persecuted church around the world, but as churches we should also pray expectantly that the Lord will raise up men within our congregations. Did not our Lord say: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Mt 9:37-38)? In obedient response to His Word, we can expect that our Lord will raise a great number of harvesters!

4. Reporting. Encourage missionaries on their furloughs to preach regularly in their calling church as well as in the cooperating churches, to speak in Christian day schools and home-

school gatherings, and hold information evenings.

5. Information. Encourage missionaries to write newsletters regularly (4-6 times/year) to the supporting churches. We recommend that the churches photocopy every missionary newsletter from missionaries they are supporting and see to it that every family in the church receives a copy, instead of posting them on a back bulletin board.

6. Hospitality. Encourage members of the calling churches as well as members of the cooperating churches to offer hospitality to the missionary/missionary helper when they are on furlough. Encourage members to correspond regularly with the missionary/missionary helper. One idea implemented by many churches already is to assign two or three different families every week to write their missionary.

7. Activity. We recommend that churches strongly encourage youth, young adults and retirees to invest their time by offering practical assistance to missionary families on the field as needs arise.

8. Budget Funding. We encourage churches to place the cause of missions as an item on their budgets. This establishes missions as an important facet of our church life.

Respectfully submitted,

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