

## Creating Missions On Ramps

Three churches share how they create and communicate ways to serve

*Do the typical “Matthews” and “Marias” attending your church know how they personally could use their time and gifts in global missions? Or do they assume missions is for someone else or some other time in their lives?*

Postings talked to three church missions leaders who are creating new missions “on ramps.” Their goal is to mobilize their congregation by matching the giftings and interests of various ages with global opportunities, particularly focusing on fresh ways to connect younger generations. While employing different means, each church sees God using more of their people in strategic roles.

### Steve Beirn—Calvary Church, Lancaster, PA

#### Starbucks week

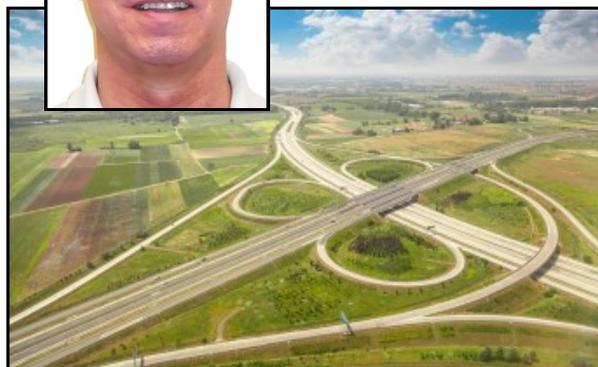
For the past three years, we have designated one week each summer as a focused time to connect with our young adults at Starbucks. We extend an invitation via Calvary's young adults' Facebook page and their website, as well as at their regular meeting. We have an online signup, and most appointments are individual (although they are welcome to bring friends). Our purpose is to begin what we hope will be an ongoing conversation about missions.

These appointments are then divided among selected members of our missions leadership team. Simply making friends is our major goal. We seek to find out what prompted them to sign up and to uncover their interests.

As appropriate, we provide information about what we think might be avenues of missions involvement for them. We offer personal encouragement and share the perspective of our church about global service.

The response to this offer of a casual Starbucks conversation has been thrilling. The off-site location makes it comfortable for Millennials; the open schedule allows them to choose the time but also forces them to make the appointment within a certain window.

The process has kick-started a number of friendships and ongoing dialog. Currently we have four or five people in our missionary preparation process because of the initial conversations that launched two years ago during our first “Starbucks week.”



#### Young adults missions think tank

In a different vein, we have initiated a young-adults think tank that meets four times a year. We hand-select individuals and couples in the 20-30 age bracket—people who have already expressed some interest in missions. Including

them in this invitation-only group communicates that we really value their input and are opening ourselves to their influence.

We launched this think tank with a one-day retreat. Other times we have met on a Saturday morning or went on a picnic together. I participate, but the discussion is run by a Millennial. There is plenty of freedom to talk about what they like and don't like.

We also use this time to discuss opportunities for them to get more involved. For example, we wanted to include some of our young adults in a Calvary contingent attending a meeting focused around our partnership in Southeast Asia. We invited participation and announced that we would cover the expenses; several volunteered to go.

It's crucial to demonstrate that the input we gather in these sessions effects change. One of these think-tank sessions recently spawned the idea of developing a "tech and communication team" for global ministries. Every one of the 14 participants in that day's discussion signed up to serve on that team!

The think tank has also been a place to identify leaders. One of the participants is currently in the process of becoming the chair of our global ministry team.

### Ministry hand-off by church-based team

Calvary has been preparing a team of people from the church to relocate overseas to reach Muslims. A key aspect of their training was to launch a local Muslim ministry. "Transplanting Life—Lancaster" was the result. Before they could leave for the field, they knew that they would have to recruit and prepare a local group of people to whom they could hand over the ministry here in Lancaster.

They did it! And we are hoping that this ongoing, local ministry to Muslims will be a feeder for additional members for our overseas team. Already two young women involved in this Lancaster outreach have expressed interest in moving to the global ministry sphere.

**Steve Beirn** has been creating missions on ramps in the local church for over 35 years. As missions pastor at Calvary, he oversees a missionary family of 115 career workers.



October 5, 2013, Calvary Church will sponsor a one-day, [Ignite! Conference](#) to share more of what they have learned about intentionally and strategically sending missionaries.

## Chris—Hill Country Bible Church, Austin, TX

### Just ask

The biggest hindrance to missions mobilization, I believe, is that no one looks people in the eye and says, "I've got an opportunity you would fit. Will you consider going?"

I query our people, "Has anyone ever challenged you to consider going to the nations?" Their answer is almost always no. We just don't ask people!

We want one question to go viral here at Hill Country Bible Church (HCBC): "Why should I stay where the gospel is already present?" This question is more powerful than asking, "Should I go?" We regularly confront our people with this question and encourage our missionaries to ask it too. We want to constantly be challenging people to see going as the norm. "If you are staying," we explain, "you should have just as clear a global purpose as those have who go."



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### Fifteen

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month, our church hosts an informal missions discussion group for those interested in mid- or long-term service.

We choose a date rather than a day of the week to make it possible for everyone to attend some sessions, even if they have another commitment one particular evening of the week. We try to make each night informal, focused, and creative. Good international cuisine in a welcoming home also helps!

The group is seeded with current and former missionaries. Our topics vary from something like, "How do missionary finances work?" To "What is a church-planting movement?" to "How can we engage with internationals locally?" The group is very multi-generational and dynamic. Some attend sporadically, but their appearance at Fifteen indicates some level of missions interest that we can then cultivate in different ways.

Because we meet just once a month, people feel they can come and explore without making a deep commitment. Once they attend, the encouragement and practical advice they receive spurs them to take next steps.

People love Fifteen because it provides an environment where they can be honest about their missions dreams and goals. Instead of meeting skepticism and bewilderment, they receive understanding and support. The networking that occurs at Fifteen has resulted in missional businesses being started in other nations, people stepping into our training program, workers going to the field together, and increased understanding of how to financially and relationally prepare to go.

### Take advantage of connection points

Many potential missions on-ramps are right in front of us, but they often go unrecognized.

One disguised on ramp is Peace Corps volunteers. When I discover someone is applying for Peace Corps service, I try to challenge them to consider missions instead. I ask, "What if you represented Jesus Christ rather than just the United States?"

Study-abroad programs are another often-wasted missions on ramp. We challenge students who are going to study overseas to expand their purpose and see this as a missions opportunity. We train them just like missionaries. For example, they learn about finding persons of peace, how to do cross-cultural evangelism, and how to mentor and disciple others. Depending on where they are going, we talk to them about practical issues such as how to be secure in communicating back to us about their missions involvement.

Another connection point for our church is profession. We have discovered that business is the language of many people at HCBC, so we create opportunities for them to go to places like East Asia and lead business forums. For example, we challenged a 55-year-old sawmill owner to coach several Central Asian men who needed his wisdom in running their businesses. After an on-location meeting, the relationships continue online.

One retired couple moved to East Asia for a year to run a mini-Bible school for 8-10 believers from minority people groups right in their home. At the end of their year, we hope to send another couple to take their place. We have other retired couples throughout the nations using their vocational skills as entry points. We try to match exper-

North Park is creating more local internships that ask for commitment and a high level of service



tise, availability, and gifting to get the right people into the right ministries.

*Chris served with his family in Central Asia before coming to HCBC Austin five years ago. He loves seeing people of all ages mobilized well to engage the unreached in traditional and creative ways.*

### Ron Burdock—North Park Church, London, Ontario, Canada

#### First engage skills locally

North Park Church is creating more local internships that ask for commitment and a high level of service. We call our people into the hard realities of our own city and give them bite-size ways to engage. For example, we do bike clinics, health care, legal advocacy, after-school tutoring. These initiatives require skilled people to make them work. Focused ministry in a specific context nurtures relationships that call our people into sacrifice.

These volunteers are tasting service in ways that pull them towards a life change that has the potential to go global. These local internships also allow us to observe people in service that demonstrates their gifts and readiness for the next step.

We constantly look for ways to give young leaders experiences that will draw them deeper into the "challenges of our time" both local and global. This past February we took 11 young leaders to Philadelphia for the Justice Conference, and we arranged for them to spend three days prior to the conference in inner-city Philly to be exposed to the urban realities of hands-on ministry and then to the broader calling that they heard at The Justice Conference. This fall we will send two young leaders to Thailand on a research trip designed to help them understand the trafficking problems there.

#### Recruitment of specific skill sets

North Park's global program focuses on people in a particular global region who have a compelling story that we believe we ought to connect with. We then work to

build thoughtful relationships with specific partners in that region, trying to ensure that the spectrum of partner-identified needs matches the capacity of our people.

What emerges are opportunities for real “added-value” individuals in our church to engage for real change. We constantly highlight how people from our congregation are using their particular abilities as part of the ongoing story of what God is doing.



When we talk about opportunities, we highlight the needed skills and training. As they hear that their specific skill set is needed for a season, our people feel the tug to respond. They see global roles through the lens of their own career, and it gives them the confidence to know that they may have what it takes to engage.

Two examples: First, we have a new Vulnerability and Exploitation Team that is completing research in Thailand. That team is comprised of about 20 Children’s Aid (child welfare) professionals, social workers, psychologists, and child-life specialists (children/youth workers) who were recruited based on their professional skill sets. Second, we have a growing ESL ministry in Asia. We promote professional ESL training as a non-negotiable requirement for involvement.

### Help us find the people for the plan

Our missions team creates an annual plan for our partnerships that describes the specific needs for the coming year. That single annual plan is what we promote throughout the year. Guilt was a motivator in previous eras but the compelling factor now is the story of the global Church’s advance and how our people can be part of our church’s collective response.

As we share the annual plan, we don’t lean on them to “go” but to “help us locate the person who should go.” North Americans have grown soft, and cross-cultural service is a big leap for most people. If we do it together as the initiative of a body, it’s less of a leap. And if people can serve using their professional training, the barriers drop even further.

### High-quality internships

Millennials are looking for shorter commitments, so at North Park we work hard to locate internships that provide 6-12 months of solid exposure to the world’s needs and opportunities. We have moved away from traditional short-term missions into these internships and find that we are now working with people who can have more impact and greater potential for long-term service.

As we seek to normalize these internships, we talk about them differently. The “Are you called to missions?” question is replaced by descriptions of learning and serving opportunities that have great value for both the intern and the ministry context.

The focus is less on the missionary call and more on missionary conviction as a lifestyle.

*Ron Burdock leverages his background in business, para-church ministry, and Oxford studies in mission and development as he leads North Park’s global ministry.*

### Interchange Postings

Catalyst’s *Postings* e-newsletter is a monthly publication designed for mission agency personnel and local church leaders involved in collaborative global efforts. The practical articles highlight what churches and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

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