

EXPAND YOUR PERSPECTIVES

How Churches and Agencies Can Use the Perspectives Course to Impact the Whole Congregation

Ellen Livingood

Without a doubt, the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course developed by the US Center for World Mission has been a major force in mobilizing global workers, especially for work among groups previously without the gospel. Many churches point to Perspectives as the galvanizing tool for moving members into cross-cultural ministry.

Yet it seems that surprising few churches have given much thought to how Perspectives integrates with their overall

missions engagement strategy. And while agencies encourage and sometimes require candidates to take the course, only a small number help churches grasp its potential as a mobilization tool.

We offer the following suggestions to stimulate further thought and efforts to maximize Perspectives' impact.

The Church Perspective

Because Perspectives is not a church-generated program, it may be less obvious that the full impact of the course still requires both ownership and integration on the part of the local church. The vast majority of the classes are held in a church facility, but more important, they need to be endorsed, promoted, and followed up, not only by the hosting congregation, but also by nearby churches.

Ideally, several churches collaborate in a rotating schedule of hosting the course. This avoids the appearance that one congregation/denomination "owns" Perspectives and also makes it accessible in various locations. In addition, a team of churches banding together for Perspectives creates a cooperative mentality that can spill over into other shared benefits, especially if the team includes congregations of various sizes and ethnic make ups.

1 Take Perspectives Yourself

If you are a church leader or missions team leader, if at all possible enroll in the [Perspectives course](#) yourself before promoting it to others. The course is available both online and via an intensive, one-week program as well as the usual, 15-week, live classroom format. If time constraints make it unrealistic to commit to all of the readings and assignments, you can still benefit greatly by taking the course at the "Key Reading" level.

If none of these options are possible, at least purchase the [Perspectives on the World Christian Movement Study Guide](#). Different from the 782-page [Perspectives Reader](#)

(also extremely valuable), the *Study Guide* provides an outline of each class. Even just skimming the contents will give you a good idea of the key concepts and scope of the course.

2 Wrestle with Conflicts in Perspective

Understand that the whole focus of the Perspectives course is on the priority of reaching the unreached. The drumbeat throughout is that the focus of missions needs to be on pioneering the gospel to unreached people groups. In contrast, most churches have a much broader concept and practice of missions, and are involved with missionaries assigned to places Perspectives describes as the "reached world."

Therefore, the introduction of the Perspectives course could serve as a pivotal time for your missions team to wrestle with issues related to where/how your money and efforts are engaged. Do you have a clear strategy by which you decide the types of ministries and peoples to which you will send missionaries or fund projects? If you support work among both "reached" and "unreached" peoples, can you clearly articulate the rationale? Are you ready to answer the questions that Perspectives will generate?

Another emphasis in the Perspectives material is on local, cross-cultural outreach. Where does reaching the nations in your own neighborhood fit into your church's missions priorities? Perspectives grads will be motivated to see your congregation reach out to internationals in your region, so it is

wise to grapple with this question and be prepared to dialog with them about it. How exciting if God chooses to use them to lead your church into new domestic or overseas cross-cultural ministry! You will want to be ready.

3 Send Your Missions Team and Short-Term Team Leaders

The members of your missions leadership team may love individual missionaries and they may have served on multiple short-term trips, but that does not guarantee that they have a big-picture understanding of missions. Perspectives will help them grasp a biblical overview of missions throughout Scripture; it will introduce them to the historical flow of how God has built the church; and it will help them to become conversant about contemporary issues of missiology such as contextualization, church-planting movements, holistic ministry, and more.

Some churches require each missions team member to take the Perspectives course. While this is a major commitment and you may risk losing them to a missions assignment reaching some unreached peoples on the other side of the globe(!), it will multiply their effectiveness on your team. Perspectives is also great preparation for anyone who will lead a short-term team. New cultural sensitivity and a larger missiological perspective will enrich their team's ministry and experience.

4 Encourage Your Church Leaders to Attend

At least one church has set a goal of seeing every pastoral staff member and elder take Perspectives. Discuss with your pastor how this might be part of your staff's professional development plan. Many elders teach an adult Sunday school class or lead a small group; perhaps you could offer to provide a substitute for one quarter while they take Perspectives. Some pastors assume they won't benefit from the class because they took a missions intro course in seminary. A perusal of the table of contents of the *Reader* will help convince them otherwise. Perspectives almost certainly covers more material, and it provides the benefit of exposure to 15 different instructors.

5 Budget for Perspectives

While the cost of Perspectives is far less than most college courses, it does come with an enrollment fee not usually associated with a church program. There are two ways your church could financially support the course in your area: Offer scholarships and/or give a gift to underwrite the overall costs for your local class. Given Perspectives' long-term impact, a line-item in your annual missions budget supporting the course would be an investment in the future of global outreach. You will also want to underwrite the cost for your church staff who enroll.

6 Recruit Specific Prospects to Attend

Many churches want to be proactively raising up the next generation of missionaries but struggle to know how to do that. One of the easiest ways is to identify individuals in the congregation for whom Perspectives could be the next step in determining God's purpose for their life. This could include everyone from high-school students to retirees. Ask other church leaders to help you identify people with promising leadership gifts, those with a passion to reach across cultures, people who demonstrate compassion for the needy, or those approaching a crossroads in their life (high-school seniors, college seniors, young adults in transition, those nearing retirement, those newly single, etc.). All are great candidates for Perspectives.

Consider what will make it possible for these individuals to take the course and make it most beneficial. Young parents may need babysitting help, not just during class hours but for additional time to complete assignments. Others may need financial assistance. Some just need your encouragement that they *can* do this and that they *should* do it. A personal invitation from a respected church leader is a huge motivator.



Identify individuals in the congregation for whom Perspectives could be the next step in determining God's purpose for their life.

Also publicize the Perspectives course broadly across the congregation. You may be surprised whom God will tap on the shoulder to attend. Show the [promo videos](#). Ask enthusiastic alumni to

share their experience. Invite the coordinator or regional director to present the opportunity to the congregation and/or in adult classes and small groups.

Debbie Atteberry, former regional director for Perspectives in Texas, suggests, "Churches could promote Perspectives as a discipleship or spiritual maturity course not just as a missions course. It is both. The class will help them understand the mission of the church; it will help them understand the mission of God; but it also will intensely grow them spiritually if they really invest time in the material."

7 Brief Students before They Begin

Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Redlands, CA, has been holding information meetings every two months as a lead-in for their first hosting of Perspectives in recent history. These meetings include a guest speaker or a showing of one of the promo videos and a description of various aspects of the course.

Missions Pastor Dave Wilson explains, "We needed to justify the cost and investment of time in order to get people to enroll. Generally our church classes and programs are free, so we wanted to explain why Perspectives has a significant price tag. And we want those who sign up to be committed for all 15 weeks—not planning a vacation in the middle. These intro sessions have given us an opportunity to lay down our expectations ahead of time.

Once students have enrolled, a pre-course session would be highly valuable. Assure them of your support, prayers, and availability throughout the next 15 weeks. Encourage those less academically oriented who may panic at the size of the *Reader* or the syllabus. From the beginning, talk about your eagerness to help them put feet to what they are learning.

8 Raise Congregational Awareness

Make sure the entire church knows that members are taking the Perspectives course. Invite a student to share a brief testimony. During a worship service, ask someone in the course to lead in prayer for the nations, drawing on what they have been learning. Share video clips of unreached groups (see www.prayercast.com as one source) as a tie-in to the course.

Encourage those in the class to invite someone else from your congregation to attend with them one evening as a guest. Most Perspectives students are recruited through the invitation of a friend.

At the completion of the class, celebrate your new graduates by acknowledging their accomplishment before the entire congregation. Then have a table in the lobby where alumni can talk to people about taking the course in the future. Start recruiting immediately for the next class!

9 During the Course, Pray Specifically for Those Attending

If Perspectives has the potential to be life changing, then it is also a time when Satan will love to interfere. Generate special prayer for those taking the course. Encourage each student to recruit one or more prayer partners who will intercede for him throughout the 15 weeks, or ask the congregation to volunteer to be matched with a student for prayer. Challenge your missions team and Perspectives alumni to intercede for students by name. Send out week-by-week requests to the entire congregation and special prayer partners, but also encourage students to share their personal requests, and to meet together for prayer, if possible.

10 Debrief during the Course

Whether one person or a whole group from your church is enrolled, remember that they are likely to go through some major worldview changes in these 15 weeks. Despite the fact that the course may be keeping them very busy, try to schedule some informal time to sit down over a cup of coffee and talk about what they are learning. Discuss things that may be confusing or troubling to them. Pray about schedule conflicts, late assignments, illness, fatigue, or other issues that Satan may be trying to use to discourage them.

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11 Maximize Benefit from Class Assignments

Several assignments during the course can relate to your church's current or potential missions outreach. If you are already involved with an unreached people group, students could complete additional research or promote that ministry. Their class work could also lead to expanded local, cross-cultural ministry. Connect with them early in the semester to discuss their assignments, and how you can facilitate their work and benefit from it.

12 Debrief Afterward

Make sure that you schedule a time shortly after the conclusion of the course to meet individually with each participant. Discuss what they believe God is saying to them. You will want to process with them any perceived conflicts between their new view of missions and what your church is doing in global outreach.

The Perspectives staff have prepared a very extensive "[Life After Perspectives](#)" study guide that assists alumni to follow through on the missions role(s) they believe God has for them. Offer to help each person determine where he fits and walk through the process together.

13 Utilize and Build on Perspectives Excitement

Perspective alumni are often bursting with new enthusiasm by the time they finish the course. They want to get involved in reaching the nations! Don't waste this passion. Brainstorm with them ways they can



share what they have learned—perhaps teach a session for [children](#), youth, or adults (Every Ethne's [Explore](#) study is a great guide, particularly for young adults), or coordinate a church-based, Perspectives-like, one-day seminar such as [NVision](#) or a multi-session course such as [Operation Worldview](#).

Or your Perspectives grads may have the vision and leadership ability to spearhead a new effort to reach internationals living nearby. If God seems to be leading them to explore a missions assignment, help them begin to pursue the next steps. Assign a mentor to walk beside them in this process.

14 Address any Negative Responses

The vast majority of Perspectives students have a wonderful experience, but be aware that some will not. They will benefit from the opportunity to talk about their negative feelings.

Some students feel inundated by the amount of reading and either drop out of the class or hang on but feel overwhelmed by the information. Encourage them to go through/back through the material at their own pace.

Some Perspectives students complete the course but struggle with its content and implications. Some feel guilty be-

cause they have not invested their life well in the past or are not sure that they can do so in the future. Others may be angry at the church (local or universal) for neglecting their missions mandate.

Another small percentage of Perspectives students heard rave reviews from their friends about the course and enrolled with unrealistic expectations. If they don't experience the emotional high they anticipated, they are disappointed.

A listening ear and balanced, objective perspective can help these individuals turn their frustrations to positive motivations.

15 Follow up Three, Six, Twelve Months Later

Don't let the Perspectives excitement be stolen by a return to the old status quo. Why not create a Perspectives alumni chapter right in your church, or help sponsor a group that includes those from other churches as well? Continue to encourage grads to find ways to be involved in reaching the unreached and in spreading the vision within your church.

16 Recruit and Encourage Coordinators

The role of the lead coordinator for a Perspectives class is extensive and a true labor of love.

Loners tend to burn out after coordinating one class, so in order to keep the momentum going, help your coordinator to recruit a half dozen others to handle the task as a team.

If there is no coordinator to lead a class in your area, talk to Perspectives alumni in your church who might be able and willing to serve in this capacity. Perspectives offers a [two-day workshop](#) to prepare new coordinators. Consider a co-coordinator approach, perhaps teaming with someone from

another congregation to get the Perspectives movement started in your area.

Don't let the Perspectives excitement be stolen by a return to the old status quo.



Keep in touch with your coordinator to offer encouragement and support. Find out how you can be praying for her and for the current class. Why not treat him to dinner or give her a gift certificate at the conclusion as an indication of your appreciation?

The Agency Perspective

1 Promote Perspectives to Churches and Individuals

Home-assignment missionaries often wring their hands at the lack of missions passion in pastors and members of their supporting churches, yet they aren't sure how they can stimulate vision. Their enthusiastic encouragement of pastors, missions team members, and prospective missionaries to enroll in the course is an excellent way to see God transform the hearts of leaders.

Ask each representative and home-assignment missionary to check the [roster of Perspectives courses](#) offered in geographic areas where they will be, then spread the word to churches and individuals with a personal endorsement. Use [quotes](#) from church leaders who have attended and who recommend their peers do so too.

Likely many of the missionaries your agency has fielded in the last two decades have been significantly influenced by taking Perspectives. Ask for testimonies, then share these stories in person, on the web, and in print.

Put an ad for Perspectives on your agency website, promote it in your print publications, and include the brochures on the table at your booth or display at conferences. Challenge appointees to recruit their friends to attend Perspectives—it may be the means of developing future teammates!

2 Encourage All Missionaries to Take Perspectives

Experienced missionaries may assume they don't need Perspectives, but joining a class has many benefits. First, it will help them understand and express the big picture of missions in a fresh way. Second, it will give them a front row seat to see what motivates people for missions, especially younger adults. And third, it will likely link them to potential recruits.

3 Inform Churches How to Use Perspectives as a Recruiting and Training Tool

Share with churches this article and point them to the [Perspectives website](#). Introduce them to the *Reader and Study Guide*. Connect them with the area Perspectives director. Talk about the outcomes and benefits.

4 Become a Perspectives Instructor

Harold Britton, Rocky Mountain Region Director for Perspectives, encourages mission agencies to recruit their best teachers to become Perspectives instructors: "Classes are filled with individuals who are prime candidates to become missionaries, church missions leaders, and donors. The most effective way for an organization to connect is for their leaders to teach one of the Perspectives sessions—it automatically provides three hours of extensive interaction!"

5 Visit Perspectives Classes

Make arrangements in advance with the coordinator to visit Perspectives classes on behalf of your organization. But don't just breeze in, hand out literature, and leave. Spend the evening as part of the class and get acquainted with the students. Encourage them in mobilizing their congregation, and explain how you can help them share their new vision and passion.

6 Help Churches Debrief Their Perspectives Graduates

Church leaders may not realize the importance of helping Perspectives alumni figure out the next step. Offer to walk through this process with them, guiding them in asking the crucial questions and identifying follow-up actions.

7 Encourage Coordinators and Regional Directors

Perspectives staff and volunteer coordinators appreciate an enthusiastic introduction to pastors and church missions team chairs. They are also refreshed if you take the time to learn their heartbeat and personally affirm them in their Kingdom ministry.

Perspectives is not part of your own agency's program. However, thanks to the vision and service of the US Center for World Mission's Perspectives team, the greater missions community can benefit from the hundreds of classes offered each year. Make sure this wonderful tool is a part of your missions mobilization toolbox!

Ellen Livingood launched and leads Catalyst Services to further church-agency collaboration. She is available to help facilitate dialog on topics such as these.



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 church and agencies are doing to mobilize believers, especially those of younger generations, to expand the Kingdom.

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