

Restructuring Local Church Missions

by *Ellen Livingood*

In far too many local churches, missions is suffering from a serious leadership deficit. Sometimes it is because the missions committee is aging and retiring. Mobilizers frequently are asked, "How can we find younger people to serve with us?" Often this question is voiced by a graying committee seeking replacements who will serve in similar capacities to theirs. They find few takers for the jobs.

In other churches, a global outreach team of varying ages is serving faithfully, but they are far too few to accomplish all that needs to be done. Missions leadership in such churches resembles the old analogy of 22 men on the football field desperately needing rest while 22,000 in the stands desperately need exercise.

New Names Don't Solve the Problem

As churches began to confront the leadership shortage, the solution often was tied to name changes. "Missions" was changed to "global outreach" or "international ministries." The "missions committee" was renamed the "missions team" or the "global outreach (GO) team." These names do sound friendlier (and I have used them in this article), but new nomenclature alone doesn't resolve the underlying issues. Nor does trying to use new technology to prop up an old philosophy and methodology.

Churches which are successfully recruiting new leaders are those which have been unafraid to readdress their global priorities as well as how they are structuring the use of lay leaders within their congregation. While this article approaches the question from an organizational standpoint, new structures are effective only if the underlying priorities are deemed worth the investment of ever-more-precious time.

Part of the organizational problem is that missions committee responsibilities usually have revolved around management functions (developing strategy/policy, churning out budgets, screening potential candidates, etc.), but these tasks do not fire the imagination of either the go-get-'em entrepreneurs who want to be on the front lines getting the job done, nor the people who just want to love and help missionaries.

Quite frankly, the average missions committee meeting doesn't stir missions passion in much of anybody. So what are the alternatives?

Mobilization roles related directly to field ministries and personal passions attract younger generations and creative leaders who automatically spread the vision to others. The results excite everybody.

ORGANIZING STRUCTURE AROUND STRATEGY

The churches which have made the most radical shift are those which have retooled their global outreach around one or more strategic initiatives, each of which is headed by a lay leader. Initiatives may be of many different types.

Churches are building global initiatives around their passions and what they feel God is calling them to do: a particular country (one church concentrated on the country of Chad for a number of years), a people group (churches have adopted unreached peoples from Mexico to South Africa to Indonesia), a type of ministry (for instance, AIDS), an evangelistic initiative (such as production of the "Jesus" film in a yet-to-be-written language), a sister church (one congregation is partnering in business-as-missions projects with large churches in world-

class cities around the globe), or a particular age bracket (for example, at-risk youth).

For most churches, a new initiative is never launched until a lay leader has been recruited who has passion for this ministry, obvious leadership gifts, a willingness to be trained, and the extended time necessary to coordinate the entire thrust. For example, indicating how seriously they take this role, Perimeter Church in Atlanta, GA, calls these initiative coordinators, "Non Resident Missionary Team Leaders."

In almost all cases, initiative leaders are tasked with recruiting a team, often 4-12 members, who will assume various responsibilities related to the church's involvement in the

Structuring Missions Leadership around the Church's Strategic Foci

initiative. They work as a team, but members usually have individual responsibilities as well.

Enthusiasm and commitment run high because almost all of team members have made at least one, often multiple visits to the field, sense a high degree of ownership of the ministry, have developed close friendships on site, and are passionately committed to reaching the project's goal(s). All of the team's efforts are directed toward furthering this particular ministry. Administration is held to a minimum; direct connection to field realities galvanizes action.

It is not unusual for the initiative leader to visit the field two to three times a year and for many of the leadership team to go annually, often leading a group ministry on site. These people become highly knowledgeable about the ministry and passionate "evangelists" for greater church involvement.

In many cases, these strategic initiative teams coordinate every aspect of the church's involvement in that location. In other churches, some aspects have church-wide coordination. For example, sending short-term teams may involve both the initiative team and an individual/team tasked with planning logistics for all ministry trips.

Coordinating Multiple Teams' Efforts

In churches where there are multiple initiatives, the leaders usually meet together as an overall leadership team or at least as an advisory board. The purpose of this group is to make sure that efforts are not redundant or competing; most decision-making is pushed down to the individual initiative level and made by the initiative leader or his/her team.

At The Chapel in Akron, OH, each Fresh Passion ministry (as their strategic initiatives are known) leader works in

consultation with one of the pastors, although not necessarily the missions pastor. This teamwork utilizes pastoral gifts and engages them in the church's cutting-edge global ministries.

At Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, MN, each Kingdom Initiative is allocated a certain percentage of the overall budget, and the initiative team then determines how to utilize those funds. In other churches, initiative teams must apply for funding. For example a team that wanted monies to scholarship national pastors to attend a training conference would develop a proposal and present it for approval at a leadership team meeting composed of all of the strategic initiative leaders. In yet other churches, funding requests go through the missions administrator.

Starting out Fresh

New congregations have the luxury of organizing their missions program from scratch focused around their purpose and church DNA. NorthBridge Church in Antioch, IL, a six-year-old congregation, is an example.

Mark Albrecht, the founding pastor, explains that from the beginning the church talked about what it would mean to be an outwardly focused church both locally and to the ends of the earth. Exciting local opportunities came their way quickly and that gave the young congregation a hunger to be part of similar outreaches globally. In order to do so with intentionality, they soon formed a missions team to establish a strategy. They studied and prayed to define what they wanted to be about.

"NorthBridge's Bridge to the Nations missions team is a strong group with a great lay leader," Albrecht reports. "And each member is attached to one of our key projects."

Structuring to Facilitate the New and Maximize the Traditional

Established churches already deeply involved with a number of missionaries and diverse ministries face the challenge of launching new initiatives while continuing prior relationships. For some, this means a blending of leadership responsibilities and styles.

At Wooddale, support/involvement with cross-cultural missions is a major part of "Wooddale Worldwide" but also included is community outreach, ethnic and immigrant

programs, and other North American ministries. Therefore, Wooddale's global outreach organizational structure incorporates all of those aspects.

Wooddale's Kingdom Initiatives receive focused attention, and each is driven by a lay team with a lay leader. A separate team fosters compassion ministries, many local but some at a distance; another coordinates ministry involvements across North America; one more team provides care and prayer for the church's missionaries not connected to one of the initiatives.

Structuring Missions Leadership around Initiatives and Types of Ministries

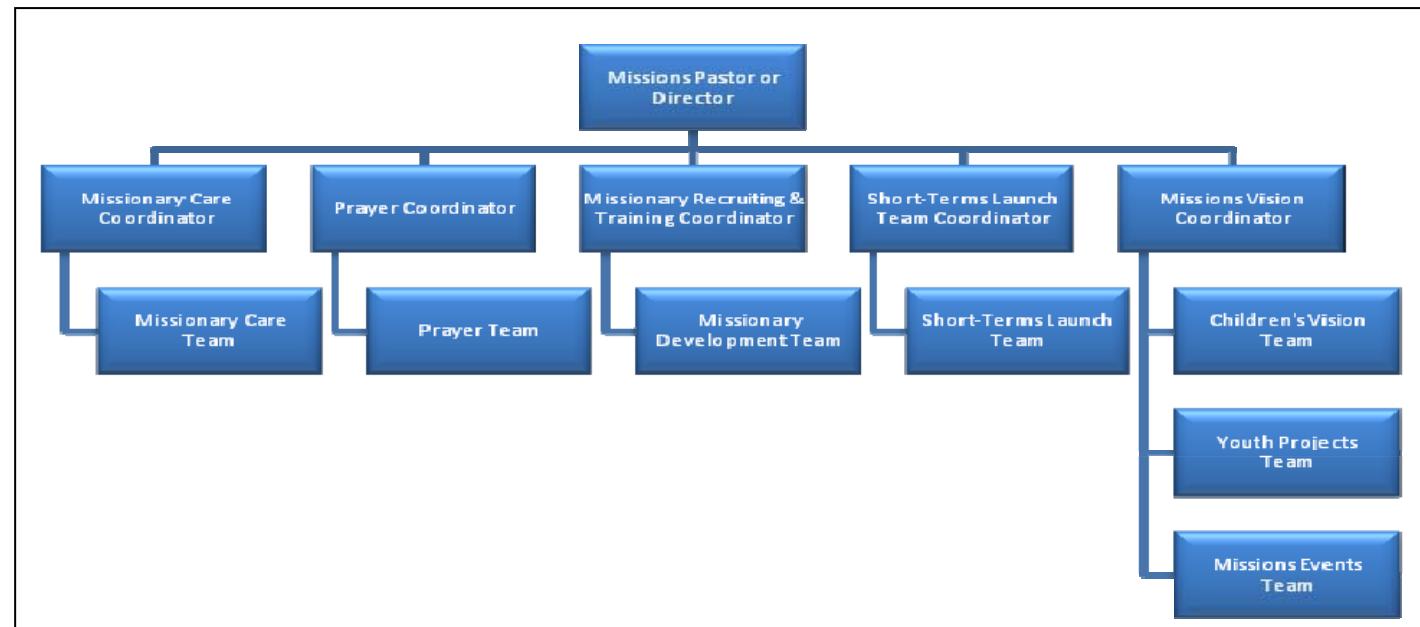


ORGANIZING STRUCTURE AROUND PASSION

Other churches are finding that the best way to engage people is to build service around passion and gifting. Therefore, while one team coordinates missionary care, another concentrates on using communications and

marketing skills to publicize global ministry to the congregation. Yet another facilitates congregational involvement in intercessory prayer, and another coordinates major events such as missions weekends.

Structuring Missions Leadership around Passions and Giftings

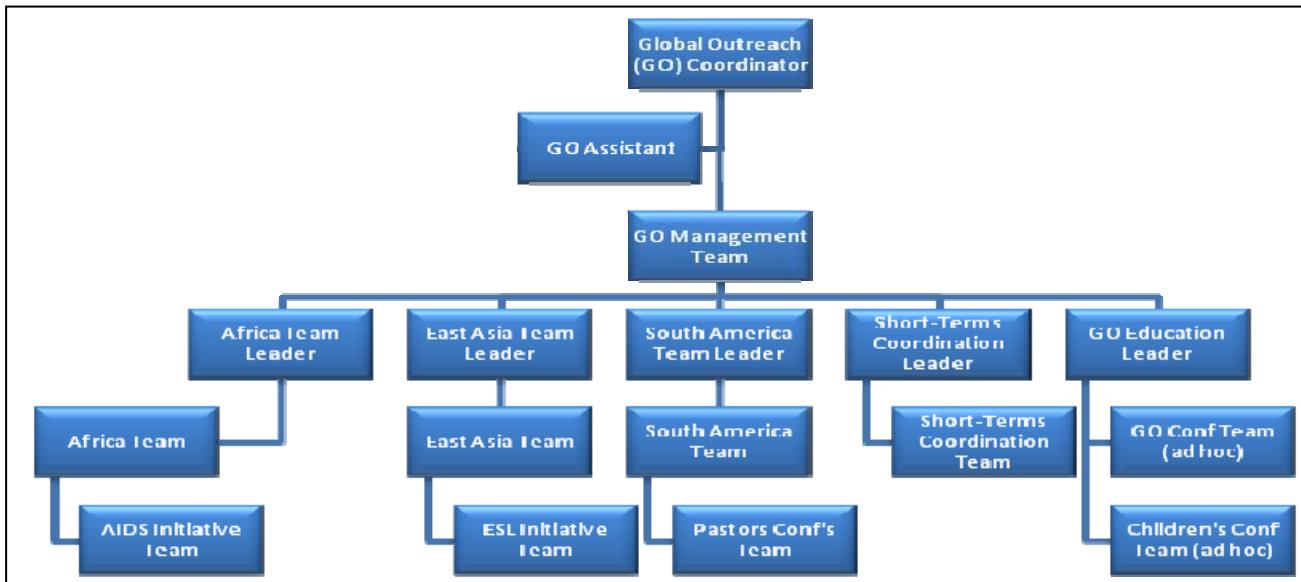


ORGANIZING STRUCTURE AROUND GEOGRAPHIC SPECIALTIES

Another organizational approach also builds on passion but coordinates missions leadership by geographic region. Each regional team is responsible for all of the church's involvement in that part of the world. Their role includes care for missionaries of the church serving in that region as well as

special projects or strategic initiatives which occur there. In this type of structure, additional teams may be developed to coordinate missions events, international ministries promotion, short-term team logistics, etc.

Structuring Missions Leadership around Geographic Specialties



Leading Church Mobilization from Strategic Initiatives

"If we organize our missions program exclusively around initiatives or geographic regions, who will be responsible for things like planning our missions weekends and promoting prayer?" church leaders wonder.

Beside the options mentioned above, another approach allows the various strategic initiatives teams to take turns coordinating mobilization events. For example, the Berber People Team may be responsible for organizing an entire missions weekend highlighting their ministry focus and bringing in some of their partners as special speakers.

Initiative teams also can be recruited to create special programs for various ages based on current field opportunities. For instance, the AIDS Initiative Team may volunteer to coordinate a school-supplies collection in children's Sunday school classes and then cooperate with the young adults to organize a short-term team to distribute these supplies in Zambia and refurbish a school there.

Coordinating the Entire Global Outreach Effort

You will notice that on each of the above organizational charts there is a different approach to overall missions leadership and administration. What most new models have in common is a commitment to minimize committee-type administrative

work by pushing decision-making authority down to the working team level and/or handing major administrative work to one individual—either a paid director or a volunteer. In smaller churches with limited budgets, early retirees with management expertise are ideal for such a role. Future Catalyst publications will deal further with issues related to new organizational structures, operations systems, and job descriptions.



Ellen Livingood, the head of Catalyst Services, has also served as the director of global outreach in a local church where she wrestled with these organizational issues. She is available to assist churches which want to make transitions.

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