

## What's Your Missions Strategy?



A tool to analyze your church's global missions approach

by Ellen Livingood

This month's *Postings* takes the form of a chart and accompanying questions to help you and your church analyze your approach to missions.

The chart of missions strategies on page 3 is not all inclusive, but it presents the most common approaches that guide Western church missions decisions. Each of these strategies can be employed alone. However, too narrow an approach can limit the church's overall impact. Generally these strategies work well when two or three are combined in a clear priority order.

As background for this discussion, you may want to refer to the January 2012 issue of *Postings* where we outlined [Five Steps toward Global Engagement](#). There we suggest you begin by setting priorities and then choose a strategy. These two fit very closely together. **Priorities** deal with the "what" of God's calling for your church—what it is you believe He wants you to accomplish. **Strategies** address the "how" of achieving those priorities.

Priority and strategy decisions have major consequences that impact the congregation as well as the church's ministry around the world. Therefore, prayer is essential to discover God's purpose and how best to engage chosen strategies.

This *Postings* provides questions to help you use the strategy charting tool in your church. You may want to print out the chart to refer to as you read the practical examples included on page 4.



On November 7, 2013, Sixteen:Fifteen will sponsor an interactive webinar on "[Blazing a Trail through the Missions Strategy Maze](#)" with Ellen Livingood. In that session, we will dig deeper into how to choose and implement an effective strategy. Register for the live webinar session or access the recording later from [Sixteen:Fifteen's website](#).

## Analyzing Our Current Strategies

Begin this process by taking an in-depth look at where your church is right now. Don't be intimidated if you have not had a clear missions strategy in the past; many churches are in a similar place. Some churches have functioned very reactively, allowing either their denomination or individual missionaries to set their priorities for them. Other congregations have had an informal strategy but may have applied it rather randomly. Here are some topics with questions to consider.

1. **Our primary missions strategy.** Which of the eight

strategy categories most closely mirrors the primary strategy we now employ?

2. **Our secondary missions strategy.** Is there a secondary strategy that also represents a high value for us? How complementary are our primary and secondary strategies?

3. **Additional strategy approaches.** Are there other key aspects of how our church goes about doing missions that are not listed on this chart (page 3)?

4. **History and ownership.** How did we come to adopt this strategy? Was it the intentional choice of leaders or was it more that we “fell into” this approach? Who currently really “owns” this strategy, i.e. Which leaders in our church strongly believe that this should be our global strategy? Who needs to own our strategy?
5. **Evaluating effectiveness.** How satisfied are we with our current approach to missions? On a scale of 1-10, how effective do we think our current strategies are?
6. **Implementation.** How consistently have we been following our missions strategies? Where and why have we diverged from our chosen path?
7. **Decision to reevaluate.** Do we need to revisit our missions strategy choices? Why? Who should be involved?

#### Where to go from here?

A “yes” answer to question #7 means you will want to spend some time considering strategy realignment. Steps are outlined below.

## Choosing Our Best Strategies

If your leadership team decides to revisit your missions strategy, commit enough time to give it careful consideration and discussion. Ask your pastor and other church leaders for input. Books like *The Meeting of the Waters* by Fritz Kling or *Missions in the Third Millennium* by Stan Guthrie offer helpful background to understand our contemporary global context. Catalyst's *Your FOCUS on the World* presents a rationale and implementation plan for the #7 option, a focus on strategic initiatives.

1. **Passion.** What is important to us as a church (overall, not just in the mission arena)? What are we doing well or what do we have a burning desire to do better as a congregation? Are there global implications of that passion?
2. **Cross-cultural missions priorities.** Do we have one or more global priorities? What do we think is most important to see accomplished and changed in our world? Do these priorities point to certain strategies as being particularly valuable in achieving what we believe God is calling us to do?
3. **Motivators.** What gets our people, especially our young adults, excited and mobilized? What opportunity has particularly connected with our people?
4. **Unused resources.** What areas of untapped potential are lying dormant in our church right now? Consider both people resources as well as other kinds of assets like finances, location, etc.
5. **Unengaged church attenders.** What percentage of our people are uninvolved or only nominally involved in missions? What strategy is most likely to build their vision and interest?
6. **Primary strategy candidate.** What one primary strategy are we drawn to? Why?
7. **Secondary strategy candidate.** Is there another strategy that would be a good complement to this primary strategy? Would each address the challenges of the other?
8. **Concentrating our energies.** If we adopted this strategy or combination of strategies, what would be our priority activities in the next 2-3 years? What would we intentionally not focus on, at least not right now?
9. **Outside assistance.** Do we need a facilitator or coach to help us begin walking this new path? (Some mission organizations specialize in deploying personnel or partnering with nationals. Some cause-based agencies can provide customized help in their area of specialty. Catalyst Services can help you find a coach or facilitator for the focus process or point toward specialists in the other categories.)
10. **Immediate next steps.** What are the three things we need to do next? Who will take responsibility to see that they are accomplished? By when?

**A word of caution:** Someone on your team may want to adopt many or even all of the strategies. This usually results in having no strategy at all. By its nature, a strategy eliminates certain choices in order to concentrate energies for greatest impact in one direction.

See the two examples on page 4, then read and respond to our blog, “[Benefits of a Clear Missions Strategy](#)” online.

# Common Missions Strategies

|            | Strategy  | Advantages   | Challenges  |
|------------|---|--|---|
|            | <p><b>None</b><br/>Maintains status quo or allows another entity (such as denomination) to shape strategy</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires only minimal maintenance</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No way to set priorities or evaluate investment</li> <li>Ministry is often disjointed and lacks compelling rationale</li> </ul>  |
| Knowledge  | <p><b>1. Educate</b><br/>Emphasizes teaching people about God's purpose and current activity</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds strong biblical basis</li> <li>Emphasizes global scope of God's activity</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowing does not automatically lead to doing</li> <li>Younger generations want to "do" before "know"</li> </ul>  |
| Investment | <p><b>2. Partner with nationals</b><br/>Seeks greatest "bang for missions buck" by underwriting Majority World workers</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nationals know culture and language, and usually cost less to support</li> <li>Acknowledges rise of global church</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ignores "go" of Great Commission</li> <li>"Missions by proxy" doesn't engage younger generations</li> </ul>  |
|            | <p><b>3. Embrace individual visions</b><br/>Empowers members of congregation to do whatever they feel called to do</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affirms individual passion and gifting</li> <li>Encourages leadership</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assumes every project is equally strategic</li> <li>Can scatter efforts, and make coordination and communication very difficult</li> </ul>   |
| Deployment | <p><b>4. Send our own</b><br/>Develops and deploys members of the church to go as missionaries wherever God calls them</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies and prepares well qualified workers</li> <li>People are drawn into the process of sending their friends</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tends to assume every volunteer and every assignment is equally strategic</li> <li>Congregation can assume missions is only for the "called"</li> </ul>  |
|            | <p><b>5. Deploy Kingdom professionals</b><br/>Encourages members to relocate into cross-cultural settings for incarnational ministry</p>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can utilize many types of expertise and gifts</li> <li>Workers can locate to communities inaccessible to official "missionaries"</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May underestimate the time demands and expertise needed for high-impact ministry across cultures</li> <li>Can be difficult to sustain for long-term results</li> </ul>                                       |
|            | <p><b>6. Adopt a cause</b><br/>Specializes in addressing a particular need wherever it occurs (such as UPGs, trafficking, leadership training, etc.)</p>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can develop extensive expertise in a particular area</li> <li>Often connects ministry "here" and "there" via a shared passion</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficult to engage breadth of church's gifting and vision</li> <li>Can seem scattered if engaged in multiple, diverse situations</li> </ul>   |
| Ministry   | <p><b>7. Focus on strategic initiatives</b><br/>Concentrates passion and resources to achieve goals in partnership with others in specific geographic areas/people groups</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds people's ownership and involvement by concentrating on a few powerful narratives</li> <li>Engages a broad spectrum of giftings within the congregation and maximizes the potential of collaborative relationships</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because "airtime" is primarily given to the focus/focuses, church attendees are less exposed to other missions ministries</li> <li>Partnerships can be messy and complex to maintain successfully</li> </ul> |

## Two Church Examples

When **ORCHARD HILL CHURCH** began to analyze their missions program, they realized that they really had no missions strategy. For several years, they had been haphazardly following a **#3 embrace individual visions** approach in that they had given some funding to every church attendee who approached them with a project. Several missions leadership team members had a passion to see Orchard Hill **#4 send our own**, but no action had been initiated.

Their strategic planning process led Orchard Hill to identify their **priority: children**. They recognized that God had particularly gifted and called them to make a difference for children at risk both locally and globally. **#6 adopt a cause** fit well as their primary strategy.

Their secondary strategy became **#4 send our own** because they had many people who already had skills in education or social work, and many mature adults whose love for grandchildren sensitized them to children's needs. Orchard Hill wants to deploy some of these people in mid-term-length ministry to needy children. As they establish plans and adopt a budget for the coming year, they now have clear goals:

1. Assist a nearby refugee ministry to teach children English and help them assimilate into local schools.
2. Query our missionaries to see who could use short-term workers to serve youth in the 4/14 window.
3. Expand the number of church families sponsoring an orphan.
4. Hold a weekend conference around the theme of children at risk that will include introductory training in crisis intervention. Conclude with a strong call to missions service on behalf of needy children.

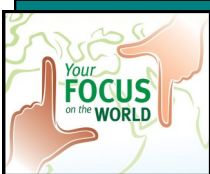
Several years ago, **FELLOWSHIP CHURCH** chose to put the vast majority of their missions effort into a **#2 partner with nationals** strategy. While they love the national partners they have gotten to know, they were sensing that their strategy was too narrow. Their own people wanted hands-on involvement. It was time for a strategy review.

As pastoral staff, elders, and the missions team prayed and wrestled with the options, they came to believe God was leading them to **two priorities: (1) church planting in a district of India** where one of their national partners is starting to train church planters but needs multiple types of assistance and **(2) a medical ministry in the Dominican Republic** where a Fellowship couple have been serving.

These priorities pointed to a **#7 focus on strategic initiatives**. And in both focuses, financial viability is crucial and would be served if Fellowship began to **#5 deploy Kingdom professionals**. The way forward is becoming clearer!

But Fellowship also recognized that they need to help their whole congregation better understand what it means to be effective disciples for Christ in the marketplace. So they added the **#1 educate** as their third strategy component. Their initial action steps include:

1. Recruit a coach to walk us through the process of developing healthy focus partnerships and engaging the congregation effectively.
2. Send a survey team to both focus sites to see what God is doing and how we can come alongside as partners.
3. Plan a sermon series and a small group study series on lifestyle discipleship. Use examples of Kingdom professionals working around the world.



Your **FOCUS On The World** is a step-by-step guide for churches seeking a more strategic impact. Learn more at [focushelp.org](http://focushelp.org).

### Interchange Postings

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