

Bringing Balance To Your Missions Program

Every local church has its own distinctive missions philosophy and practices. Whether these ideas are written down or exist in the minds of the pastoral staff or missions committee, they are normally a mixture of biblical principles, family ties, cultural values, corporate management practices, personal preferences and the church's history and traditions.

BIBLICAL BALANCES

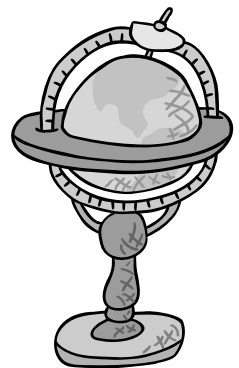
Just before He ascended, Jesus told His disciples: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NKJV). In this statement, Jesus mentioned the different geographic areas to which the gospel must be carried. They were not to just stay at home, nor were they to just go overseas. Rather, they needed to strike a balance between ministry in their hometown, ministry in their region, ministry in a nearby cross-cultural region, and ministry in foreign lands.

More than two decades later, the church in Antioch was the first to release a church-planting team committed to evangelism, discipleship, leadership development and starting reproducing churches in a foreign land. Over time, more teams went out, and the process of coordinating and supporting these church-planting missions became more complex. In Romans 15:22-33, we see that Paul made extensive plans for travel, transported funds for churches in need, and called for churches to help and pray for his efforts. In Romans 16, we read of many who had helped Paul in various cities where he had ministered.

MISSIONS REFLECTING CULTURE

Missionary outreach often mirrors the focus of the sending culture. If a nation's government has a great burden for foreign lands, its churches will often have a great missionary burden as well. In the 18th and 19th centuries, English imperialism colonized portions of Africa and the Far East. At the same time, English churches sent thousands of missionaries into the jungles, deserts and savannahs to civilize and Christianize the native peoples.

After World War II, while the American government exerted its economic and military influence to make the world safe for democracy, American churches sent out an unprecedented workforce of overseas missionaries. In retrospect, their enthusiasm for overseas missions may have obstructed their view of the huge spiritual needs in our own cities and among our immigrant populations (our Judeas and Samarias). Since the end of the Cold War Era in 1989, Americans have focused on their domestic prosperity and problems, and predictably, American churches have seen a 25% decline in the number of overseas missionaries, while Stateside ministries are flourishing.



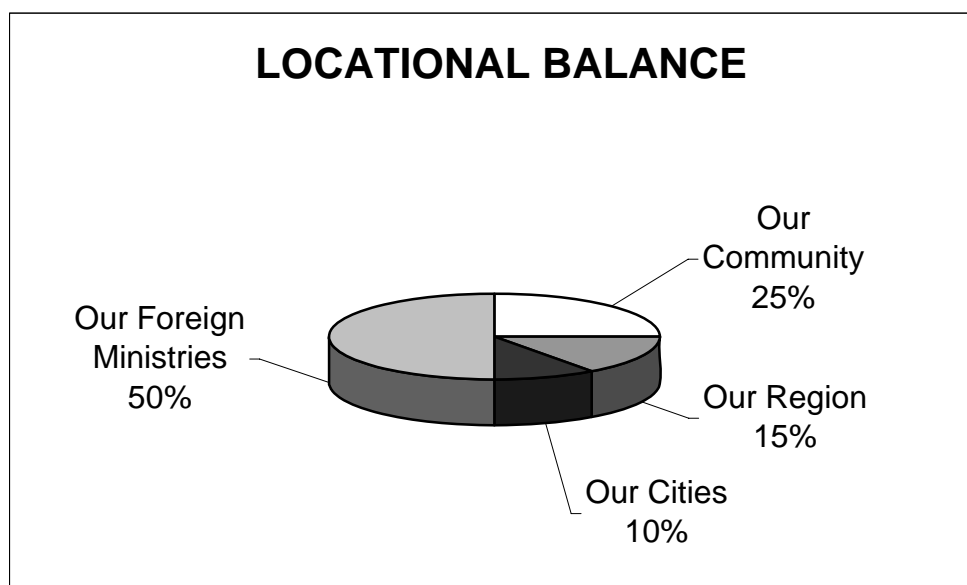
Should church leaders be content to support the focus of America's government leaders. Or should they take another look at their church's missions philosophies and practices. Are they proactive or reactive? Are they biblical and balanced, or merely reflective of the culture or popular ideas?

EVALUATING YOUR LOCATIONAL BALANCE

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Are these geographic areas balanced in your missions program? Most churches consider Jerusalem ministry to be their evangelistic outreach. Many churches have to give further consideration to engaging in and supporting ministries that reach their region or state, and those that reach cross-culturally into the inner-city ethnic communities.

America is more of a melting pot now than it has ever been. Church planters can plant churches in a "foreign" culture using a foreign language right in downtown New York, Atlanta, Miami or even a little town like Garden City, Kansas. Remember also that when it comes to training overseas church planters, there is no better proving ground than working cross-culturally in a nearby town or city.

In the chart below, a local church evaluated its missions and evangelism budget, time and personnel and was pleased to find that, while they had supported overseas missionaries and had been faithful in their evangelistic endeavors, they had also diversified the focus of their missionary outreach into their "Judea and Samaria" as well.



EVALUATING YOUR VOCATIONAL BALANCE

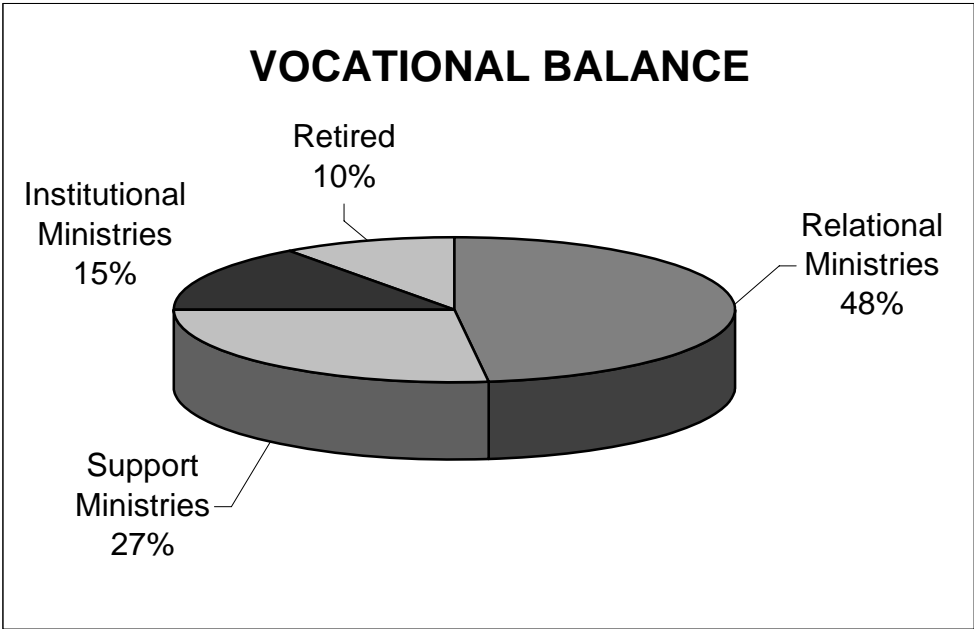
According to Acts 13, the first church leaders sent out as missionaries were church planters. The end result of the Great Commission is not merely making converts or even discipling young believers – it should be the planting of an autonomous local church that will reproduce itself in time.

When the number of American missionaries expanded fifty years ago, and new technologies developed, the workforce diversified into more specialized areas of personal, institutional and support ministries. Many churches today try to strike a balance between supporting missionaries in these three areas, while also supporting the increasing number of retired missionaries. Here's a look at some of the positions and activities of missionaries in these ministry areas:

Personal Ministries	Institutional Ministries	Support Ministries	Retired Ministers
Evangelism Translation Discipleship Training Nationals Church Planting Pastoring	Radio Station Medical / Hospital Bible College / Seminary Orphanage Bookstore	Secretarial Accounting Administration Publications Maintenance Boarding Child Education Housing / Hostel Tech Support Pilot / Transport Mechanical Translation	On field – over 30 hrs/wk On field – under 30 hrs/wk Off field – over 30 hrs/wk Off field – under 30 hrs/wk

In the chart below, a local church evaluated where its missionaries were deployed and the types of ministry they were involved with. In years gone by, the church had heavily supported institutional missions due to several of the church families sending their children into such ministries.

Over time, the missions committee had tried to bring back a greater focus on relational ministry, and after two trips to a mission board's home office, realized the important role that support staff play in getting missionaries to the field and coordinating their efforts there. The committee was concerned with how to serve and support to four of its missionary couples who were retiring from the field. One of the couples was eventually hired to train the congregation in evangelism and discipleship and begin a ministry to senior saints.



Take some time to evaluate whether your church's missions program is diversified and balanced. We dare not suggest what the "correct balance" might be – that is for you to determine after praying for wisdom in this area. If your missions program is not balanced, consider what factors caused it to become so, and what hurdles you might face to bring it back into balance. Make a long range plan to keep a diversity between your Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and Uttermost ministries and keep them in balance.