

# URCNA Foreign Missions Manual

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## **I. Principles of Foreign Missions for the URCNA<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

In the Great Commission, the risen Lord Jesus calls the apostles, and through them his whole church, to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28.18-20). Ever since, the church has confronted man's post-fall plight by seeking to equip all of God's people to participate in the church's mission to the world, and by sending missionaries to preach the gospel to the unconverted. This great task belongs to the church today as much as ever, and it must involve every local congregation.

Without involvement in foreign missions, the local congregation will become disconnected from the body of Christ that exists throughout the world; but then that congregation can even become uninterested in the lost souls that surround it. By contrast, the more meaningful contact our churches have with the unconverted and with churches of other countries, the better we will understand the gospel's power.

The Missions Committee prays that the Lord of the church will use this manual for foreign missions to help URCNA congregations and missionaries more effectively to fulfill the task that the Lord has given us. As a federation, we must share the conviction that greater preparedness for missions will result from a wise plan and sound principles. What follows are those foundational principles that should guide us in foreign missions.

### **A. The Need to Work Together**

Our Reformed churches recognize that the best way for us to walk together in practice is for us to have agreement in our principles (Amos 3.3). For this reason, we have agreed to order our ecclesiastical relations and activities on the basis of clearly defined biblical and confessional commitments (see the introduction to the Church Order of the URCNA). But this has not always been applied to the arena of foreign missions. For the sake of more effective and responsible work in foreign missions, the churches of our federation must agree upon a shared strategy for our cooperation.

In the work of foreign missions, a federation of churches could hardly conduct itself "decently and in good order" (1 Cor. 14.40) if it were unable to answer some very basic and important questions. What is the church's mission? Who are its missionaries? Who should oversee missionaries? How should they be prepared for their work? But there are also more nuanced questions that a well-ordered church must ask (and answer) in a unified way. Are there regions of the world in which our combined efforts might be most

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<sup>1</sup> See the URCNA study committee report, *Biblical and Confessional View of Missions* (Acts of Synod 2001, pp. 101-114); the Church Order of the URCNA, sixth edition (2007), Article 47; "Fulfilling the Great Commission: A Shared Strategy in URCNA Missions" (Acts of Synod 2012, pp. 516-526); *How to Plant a Reformed Church. The Church Planting Manual of the United Reformed Churches in North America*, 2015 edition (Acts of Synod, 2014, pp. 359-423).

effective? Are there particular forms of mission work in which our churches could participate more productively than in others?

Our churches have agreed to “make every effort to unify all of our resources (gifts, talents, and finances) as one united federation in order to bring the gospel from our homes and churches to the nations of the world.”<sup>2</sup> To that end, our missions committee and coordinator have been called to “function as an information hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication and facilitating cooperation between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregations.”<sup>3</sup> As more of our churches better understand the existing fields of foreign ministry, as well as the future opportunities, we will more faithfully be able to partner together through prayer, personal involvement, financial support, the sharing of ideas, and encouragement.

## **B. The Consistory Calls and Sends the Missionary**

It is the local Consistory that has the authority to call and send ordained missionaries, then to oversee the missionary and supervise the mission work. The possession of such authority, however, does not mean that every Consistory is adequately equipped to engage in foreign missions. Therefore, it is important to seek education and training for foreign missions well in advance of sending a man to the field, and to seek assistance from the Missions Committee and Coordinator for their input. The specific responsibilities of the sending Consistory are as follows:

### **1. Overseeing the Missionary, and Supervising His Work:**

It is vital for the sending church to have a strong relationship with its missionary, both for his own wellbeing and for the health of the mission work. The Consistory can develop and maintain such a relationship by:

- a. acquiring a thorough knowledge of the particular foreign field;
- b. maintaining regular contact with the missionary through phone calls and other means of live communication (the mission work should be on the agenda for monthly Council meetings);
- c. visiting the missionary; visits should be made –
  - i. at least once every two years;
  - ii. by at least two representatives of the Consistory, who would make a thorough report to the sending church after the visit;
  - iii. in consultation with the Missions Committee and Coordinator, for the sake of greater cooperation throughout the federation;
  - iv. with the purpose of having a “house visit” with the missionary and his family, and of providing the missionary with pastoral encouragement and advice regarding his work;
  - v. with the purpose of reviewing progress regarding short and long-term plans for the work, and adjusting those plans for the future;

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<sup>2</sup> *Acts of Synod Nyack 2012*, pp. 516-517.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

- vi. with the purpose of obtaining feedback from any national groups with whom the missionary cooperates.
2. Ensuring Adequate Financial Support for the Missionary and His Family:
    - a. by providing adequate information and regular updates about the work to the local congregation, the surrounding classis, and the federation (the establishment of a Joint Venture Committee within a classis often provides the sending church with steady financial support for its missionary from the other churches that participate in the JVC);
    - b. by organizing opportunities for the missionary, while on furlough, to visit the churches of the federation for preaching and mission presentations.

### **C. Those Who Are Sent to the Foreign Field**

1. Ordained Missionaries:

While there are diverse ways for our churches to be involved in foreign missions, our federation is especially committed to sending out ordained missionaries whose focus is the making and growing of disciples through the ministry of the Word and sacraments.<sup>4</sup> Ordained missionaries are sent out on a long-term basis, and funded by the churches of the federation.
2. Missionary Helpers:

It is appropriate in many instances, and sometimes necessary, for elders, deacons, and non-ordained people to assist ordained missionaries on the foreign field. Missionary helpers might be sent to serve in such roles as teachers, doctors/nurses, evangelists, Bible translators, etc.<sup>5</sup> We therefore need to encourage all our church members to consider how they might use their gifts to serve the Lord in reaching the nations.

  - Missionary helpers should be considered for service only with the agreement of the ordained missionary on the field.
  - They will work under the direction of the ordained missionary and his Consistory.
  - They are responsible to raise their own financial support, under the supervision of their local consistory.

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<sup>4</sup> Church Order of the URCNA, Article 47: "The church's missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. When this task is to be performed beyond the field of an organized church, it is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor..."

<sup>5</sup> *Biblical and Confessional View of Missions* (Acts of Synod 2001, pp. 105-106).

#### **D. Involvement of the Synodical Missions Committee & Coordinator**

The New Testament clearly shows that in various ways the churches partnered with each other to advance the spread of the gospel throughout the world. The Philippian church gave financially to the support of Paul's missionary work (Phil. 4.14-18); the Colossian church sent ministry associates to aid the apostle (Col. 4.9, 12). There was a great deal of missionary traffic between the churches of the first century. Such cooperation was vital to the spread of the apostolic church, and it is something we must strive to imitate.

The work of foreign missions is a complex undertaking. It is very difficult for a Consistory to provide a mission work with meaningful and effective oversight from afar. The Lord does not guarantee the "success" of any mission work, but since he directs us to seek safety in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11.14), Consistories must avoid the practice of making uninformed, unilateral decisions. The wise course would be for a Consistory to seek advice from others, not only before sending a man to a foreign field, but also throughout the duration of his work.

Advice may come from various quarters, but our federation has established the Synodical Missions Committee, and has appointed a Missions Coordinator, for this very purpose: to advise and aid Consistories that are engaging in missions, both at home and abroad. If the federation is to maintain a common strategy in our missionary endeavors, the committee and coordinator should be involved throughout the process. For the sake of unified efforts in foreign missions, sending churches and missionaries should consult with the Missions Committee and/or Coordinator:

- when investigating and visiting a potential field;
- when considering candidates who might serve as missionaries;
- when making long-term plans for an existing work;
- when addressing problems on the field;
- when there are special financial needs;
- when considering the closing of a work;
- when planning for a work to federate with other churches.

#### **E. The Priority of Strengthening Current Fields**

In keeping with our Lord's command, the churches of our federation desire to make disciples of people from all nations. But the massive scope of that mission will not excuse the practice of multiplying foreign fields in such a way that many are rendered weak and vulnerable. Our foreign mission works may spread far and wide, but then our federation can easily find itself spread too thin. With a united concern for our missionaries and their families, for the congregations that they serve, and for the effectiveness and longevity of all our foreign works, our federation must keep its focus on strengthening current fields before spreading to new ones.

Missionaries rarely worked alone in the apostolic period. It seems that the Lord was pleased in most cases to establish his gospel through the testimony of two witnesses

(Luke 10.1ff; Acts 13.2ff); but he was also pleased in most cases to spread his church *not* by means of isolated missionaries but rather through the labor of missionary teams (evident throughout the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul). Our federation should strive to approximate the pattern of missionary labor that we find in the New Testament by guarding against the isolation of any missionary on a foreign field. With more cooperation among our own churches, and with more effort to work (where possible) with national churches abroad, we will be able to ensure that our foreign missionaries have co-laborers who can visit them, aid them, and even relieve them when necessary.

## **F. Biblical Contextualization on the Foreign Field**

### **1. Avoid Paternalism:**

In many countries the very presence of a foreign missionary will have a significant impact on a national people. Missionaries must be very careful not to lord it over those to whom they minister (Matt. 20.25-28), and must continually strive to become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9.22). A missionary will render his ministry ineffective unless he diligently assumes the humble posture of a learner before a national people.<sup>6</sup> Our goal on the foreign field is not to reproduce a North American church.<sup>7</sup>

### **2. Avoid Dependency:**

Dependency occurs when the missionary and his sending church engage in a ministry that aims to take care of all the financial needs of the nationals, encouraging their perpetual dependence on their caretakers. Our foreign mission works must strive from the start to develop responsible national congregations that will not be perpetually dependent on the missionary or his sending church for their sustenance, governance, and propagation.<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Promote a Word and Deed Ministry:**

Many so-called ministries have abandoned the gospel in exchange for social rehabilitation. We must not, however, make the opposite mistake of teaching the gospel while showing little interest in the temporal needs of the listeners (cf. Luke 4.18f; James 2.14-17). Our foreign missions must seek to emulate the holistic ministry of our Lord, whose mercy went out to sinners in all of their spiritual and physical brokenness.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 109-113.

<sup>7</sup> See J.H. Bavink, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960). "Too frequently we have failed to see that the education we give and our whole attitude toward life is to a strong degree propaganda for Western culture, with its extremely dangerous elements. Therefore one of the requirements of every missionary is that he must be critical of his own life and of the culture which he always carries with him even though he may be unaware of it" (107).

<sup>8</sup> Peter Beyerhaus, *The Responsible Church and Foreign Missions* (1964).

## **G. The Training of National Men**

Our goal in foreign missions is the establishment of national churches that have the resources and responsibility not only to maintain and govern their own ministry, but also to spread that ministry elsewhere through the planting of other churches. To that end, it is important that national men who are interested in pursuing the ministry of the Word be directed to Biblical and theological education that will help to prepare them for ministry. Ideally, these men could obtain a sound theological education in their home country, either at a faithfully Reformed seminary or by means of extension courses; this would allow them to remain involved in their local congregation where their gifts would continue to develop. Where a sound theological education cannot be obtained at home, this education should be sought through a foreign seminary (in North America or elsewhere), though particular challenges are often attached to this scenario.

## **Conclusion**

It is the Lord Jesus, our only Head, who gathers, defends and preserves for himself the one, holy, catholic church. Since he is primarily doing this great work through the church's execution of the Great Commission, may the Holy Spirit further equip the URCNA in all its missionary activity be faithful to the Lord and to his Word.

## **II. *Five Phases in Foreign Missions***

### **A. Phase One – Exploration of the Prospective Mission Field**

Though it is occasionally the way churches begin to engage in mission work, responding to every foreign opportunity by sending missionaries would not help our federation to develop a shared strategy for greater effectiveness and long-term sustainability in our missionary endeavors. Consistories that desire to be more proactive in foreign missions, and that seek greater cooperation in their efforts, will explore potential foreign fields in consultation with the Missions Committee and Coordinator. While we have been given a mission to the whole world, the reality is that certain fields are fallow, others are infertile (currently, at least), some are very fertile, and then a few are ripe for harvest. A Consistory will want an intimate knowledge of any particular field (the country as a whole, as well as the smaller regions) before considering potential candidates for the ministry. Ideally, Consistories will partner with the Missions Committee in the identification of the right foreign field, in the deeper investigation of that field, and in the implementation of a specific strategy for reaching that field. This ground work will put a Consistory in a good position to send, supervise and support a foreign missionary; and the cooperation with others will result in greater effectiveness and longevity.

## **B. Phase Two – Preparing the Missionary & His Family for the Foreign Field**

### 1. Searching for the Right Missionary to Send:

Once a Consistory has taken the steps necessary to gain an intimate knowledge of a particular mission field (e.g. by visiting the location, and by consulting with those who have already served there), it will begin searching for the right man for the job. He must not only have the spiritual maturity that is required for ordained ministry but also be suited for laboring in the foreign field. In order to determine a man's competence and suitability for a particular work, the Consistory needs to engage in a thorough interview process, including careful examination of all references.

### 2. Training the Missionary before He Is Sent:<sup>9</sup>

In order to be prepared for labor in foreign missions and in a particular field, a minister of the Word will need more specific training than he could have received through a typical seminary education. In addition to providing the man with an adequate wage, the sending Consistory will also need to underwrite the expenses that accrue on account of the following steps of preparation:<sup>10</sup>

#### a. *General Training for Foreign Missions:*

New missionaries should be sent to one of the various institutions that provide intensive education and training that will help to prepare them for ministry in foreign missions.

#### b. *Training in a Specific Language:*

Significant time and money must be invested in learning the primary language that is spoken on the field. It can take a year of intensive study to gain the most basic facility in a new language; it may take another year or so of immersion in the language to gain the fluency needed for ministry among its native speakers.

#### c. *Cultural Training:*

In order to serve profitably in a foreign context, missionaries must have thorough knowledge of that culture in which they hope to labor. In many cases, such knowledge can be acquired only through a course of education that is focused on that culture, and through a course of training for life within it. Cultural education and training will help the missionary not only to avoid making many embarrassing or offensive cultural blunders among the foreign people which he plans to serve, but also to grow in his love for that people and in his ability to communicate God's truth to them more effectively. A good deal of cultural training must take place before the missionary is sent; but for its completion, the missionary may need to

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<sup>9</sup> The following material applies to missionaries whose origin and/or language is not the same as that of the people whom they serve.

<sup>10</sup> If the missionary has a wife and children, the Consistory will also need to see to their preparation.



visit the foreign field for a season of culture immersion. Of course, even after beginning their service among a foreign people, a missionary and his family will want to continue growing in their knowledge of the people whom they serve.

d. *Orientation:*

The reality of living on the mission field is often very different from what is initially imagined. Therefore, before sending a man, the Consistory must ensure that he receives a thorough orientation pertaining to the particular location in which he will labor (unless he is already intimately familiar with it). If possible, the Consistory and their missionary should also consult with others who have experience in that country. In some cases, it will be necessary for the man to make an introductory visit to the field. Of course, the Consistory will also have to work through numerous practical matters with the missionary and his family before sending them (e.g. housing, transportation, immigration, health insurance, education of children).

e. *On-Field Training:*

A pioneering missionary (one who goes to a place to begin a work from the ground up) may not have the privilege of much on-field training; in which case he may find Christian fellowship among missionaries from other Evangelical or Reformed denominations. But for those new missionaries who are seeking to join a team that is already in existence it is important to have sufficient time after arrival during which they may become acclimated to their new surroundings. Of course, before beginning his labors, the new missionary will also need a sufficient period of time to move his family and get them settled in a foreign country. Ideally, he would have very limited, if any, involvement in the daily workings of the mission for the first year, followed by a gradual transition into the ministry. This allows for a missionary to understand and grow familiar with the context in which he will labor. Ideally, new missionaries would have two to three years of overlap with senior missionaries.

### **C. Phase 3 – Establishing an Entrance Strategy**

Since the URCNA is a federation composed of churches that aim to assist one another in our mission to the world, our Consistories should generally not plan to begin isolated foreign mission works. Instead, when determining where to work in the world, it would be appropriate for a Consistory to consider where our federation or another is already working, if those active missions could be fortified by the addition of another missionary, or if weary missionaries should be relieved of their service. This teamwork mentality is essential to the longevity of faithful Reformed missions in all foreign fields.

1. Prioritize Partnership with Missionaries from Other Denominations (where possible):  
When exploring the potential of a prospective mission field, it would be wise to seek partnership with any biblically sound churches and missionaries that are already working in that field. In many cases, their experience will provide them with a much better sense than we could have with regard to the assets and needs of that particular field. Our churches should seek to work with groups that are compatible with the Reformed faith that we confess and practice.
2. Prioritize Partnership with National Reformed Denominations (where possible):  
The vastness of the mission field, as well as the scarcity of biblical and Reformed witness throughout the world, should compel our federation to form partnerships with sound Reformed denominations that are already established in foreign nations. Why would we work to establish a new Reformed church or federation where one already exists? Unless we want to create an ecclesiastical rivalry, the URCNA must consult with any faithful Reformed denomination or church of another country where we hope to labor.
3. Prioritize Partnership with Other URCNA Churches and Missionaries:  
As a Consistory and missionary explore a prospective field, they should consider whether laboring in that place would be in keeping with the overall strategy of working together in our mission endeavors. Each new mission work will either strengthen or weaken the current labors of the federation. If we are to avoid “flash-in-the-pan” mission works that will dilute our limited resources, our Consistories need to know that there is sufficiently broad support throughout the federation for the sustaining of a mission work for many years to come. In consideration of such matters, Consistories ought to consult with the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator, which have been established in large part to help facilitate greater cooperation among the churches of the federation.
4. Prioritize Long-term Sustainability, While Tending to Short-term Goals:  
Failure to count the cost of ministry abroad can result in doing a great disservice to the cause of the Gospel. Since foreign mission works usually take many years to be firmly established, it is vital that Consistories and their missionaries plan for long-term engagement with any particular field. While a strategy must be determined with a view to the long-term sustainability of the mission, short-term goals must also be made in service to that long-term vision. The Consistory and their missionary should make one-year, two-year, and five-year plans which are then periodically reviewed in order to see that goals are being accomplished.
5. Determine Times of Service in a Mission Field:  
While a Consistory would not typically set an end date for the service of their missionary before his service begins, it is important to determine the length of his terms of service between furloughs. The scheduling of terms and furloughs will be tentative, and adjustments will be made along the way. But for the health and

endurance of the missionary, of his family, and of the mission work itself, a Consistory must remain committed to a basic plan for service terms.<sup>11</sup>

#### **D. Phase 4 – Establishing a Mission Church**

What is the initial task for the missionary on the foreign field? There will be some cases in which a Consistory sends a missionary to a foreign field that has no Reformed church, perhaps where there is no faithful Gospel witness at all. In such a context, the missionary's initial task will be to spread the Gospel to people in that particular locale with the goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ, and eventually establishing them as a congregation with his blessing – the following points begin with such a situation in view. There will be other cases, however, in which a Consistory sends a missionary to a foreign field where he will serve as pastor for a group of Christians who already gather regularly for worship and fellowship (perhaps they were previously served by another URCNA missionary) – the third point below begins to address this situation. Of course, there will also be cases where a Consistory sends a missionary to serve a mission work that is overseen by a different Reformed denomination (national or otherwise). In such a context, the missionary will need to follow the guidelines of that denomination to which he is loaned for service on the foreign field.

##### 1. Initiating Discipleship by Evangelizing the Unconverted:

To whatever degree he might be employed in other work, the ordained missionary's primary calling will be to serve continually as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, spreading the Gospel to as many of his neighbors as possible, prayerfully seeking for God to change hearts and bring sinners to a true faith in the Savior. This primary evangelistic task will require the missionary to develop meaningful relationships with the people around him, as he publicly and privately seizes every opportunity to share the truth of Christ.

While he may initially cast a wide net, involving himself in a variety of activities across a broad area, the missionary will likely need to narrow his focus to a particular community (ideally, the one in which he lives). This will allow the man to love and serve people around him in tangible ways, providing him with opportunities more naturally and effectively to testify about Christ. The missionary's hospitality will be a vital component in his ministry, as it will allow him to bring people into his home where a meal can be shared and the Gospel can be discussed in a personal manner. Eventually, Bible studies will take place in his home, and then also in the homes of those he is evangelizing.

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<sup>11</sup> In its manual for foreign missions, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church stipulates that single missionaries have a term of three years, and that married missionaries have terms of four to six years. See section 4.8 of the *Manual of the Committee on Foreign Missions of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, p. 31.

## 2. Making Disciples through Profession of Faith & Baptism:

Through God's gracious blessing upon the missionary's evangelistic work, sinners will come to faith in Christ. While new converts may readily claim to believe in private, it will be important for the missionary to encourage them to profess their faith publicly (Luke 12.8-9; 1 Tim. 6.12). To prepare them, the missionary will want to take converts through an essential outline of the Christian faith – context will largely determine the degree to which he uses the Reformed confessions. He will also need to make it clear that making public profession of faith requires new converts to make solemn vows before God and His people, the congregation to which they are joined by means of professing faith (these vows made on the mission field should not substantially differ from the vows of church membership that are made in any established congregation in North America).

If new believers have not already received a valid Christian baptism, their official inclusion into the church through profession of faith must be attended by their receiving the covenant sign (Matt. 28.19; Acts 10.44-48; 16.30-34). Consistories should therefore send missionaries to the foreign field with the working assumption that this ordained servant is going to baptize people before a local congregation is established. In fact, the baptism of those first professing believers and their children should constitute the beginning of a new congregation that also includes the missionary and his family.

Once new converts have received adequate instruction, a ceremony should be planned for professions and baptisms to take place in the presence of the missionary, his family, and other believers. Where it is safe and feasible, numerous other people should be invited to witness the joyous occasion to the praise of God. The significance of these professions and baptisms should be explained through the reading and exposition of Scripture, and God's blessing on the new church members should be sought in prayer.

## 3. Growing Disciples through the Ordinary Means of Grace:

Sinners are saved in order to become true worshipers of God (1 Pet. 2.9); but public worship is also the context in which disciples grow more mature and fruitful through the ministry of the Word and sacraments (Heb. 10.19-25), those ordinary means that God has appointed for the working of His saving and sanctifying grace. In North America, a core group of people may meet as a Bible study for a year or two before a worship service takes place. On the foreign field, however, the missionary will usually want to begin holding worship services as soon as a few converts form a fledgling congregation (even though it would lack a body of elders).

Throughout his ministry, the ordained missionary will need to continue going from house to house (Acts 20.20) in order to care for believers and their families, and to train them in family worship. But since he is seeking to establish a core group of Christians as a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, his early instruction for the people should give careful consideration to the subject of public worship – its nature and purposes; the basic elements; the proper conduct of the people; the leading of the pastor. When the initial core group of disciples is ready, the missionary should bring them together for the public

worship of God (ideally, in a centralized location on the Lord's Day). If their simple service is to approximate what we find in Acts 2.42, it will include the reading and preaching of the Word, prayer and song, and the regular administration of the Lord's Supper, as approved by the missionary's Consistory. Private modes of discipleship and worship should always continue, but the communal discipleship that occurs in public worship through the ordinary means of grace will be used by God to grow the saints in their love for God and for each other. The following four points should be considered in connection with gathering the mission's initial members.

*a. The Location of the Gathering for Study and/or Worship:*

The missionary's home may serve well as a meeting place for a group Bible study, and initially it might also be adequate for public worship services. But with God's blessing, the core group will eventually outgrow the missionary's home (and any other private residence) so that it will be necessary to look for a larger facility. If the fledgling church is to be accessible to the greatest number of people, not just conveniently located for those initial participants, it is important to find a building in the most central location possible; and it would be ideal for the church building to be very visible to the surrounding community, as long as such visibility is legal and safe. Of course, the missionary will also have to take account of the affordability and suitability of the facility (its size, safety, availability).

*b. The Ultimate Goal of Gathering as a Core Group:*

The missionary will need to make it clear to those whom he serves that his goal is *not* to plant among them a church belonging to the URCNA, or even to duplicate that federation on foreign soil. Rather, he must clarify that his ultimate goal is to glorify God by making and growing Christian disciples who might be established one day as a healthy congregation with its own ordained leadership. If that mission is accomplished through God's gracious blessing upon his Word, this new congregation will in turn seek to advance God's Kingdom further by spreading the Gospel to others and planting churches that will belong to a national Reformed federation of churches – a federation with which the URCNA could have fraternal relations. Finite and fallen men are not sufficient for such a task. Therefore, the members of the mission must steadfastly continue in prayer that God would richly bless the ministry of the Word so that the saints are equipped to share the Gospel with others, and to adorn it with godly lives.

*c. The Course of Biblical Instruction:*

The missionary must be rigorously committed to using God's Word to edify professing believers and their children so that they would grow more mature in their Christian faith, and demonstrate that growth in their love for one another and for those outside the church. Key in the discipleship of new converts is grounding them firmly in the Gospel, and training them to rely daily upon God's grace in Christ through Bible study and prayer. The saints will also need to be given a Christian worldview that is rooted in the general flow of redemptive history (creation, fall, redemption, consummation). While the Scriptures must have pride

of place, the Reformed confessions should also be carefully implemented in the discipleship of the core group, which must gradually be taught what it will mean for them to be a confessional church (studying a basic church order would also be important in this connection). It will also be vital for the missionary regularly to confront the falsehood of the other religions and ideologies that pervade in that place; to expose the national customs and sensibilities that are antithetical to Christianity; and to warn the people of the deceptive power of sins that they face each day. Disciples of Christ must be trained not only to know the truth about Christ but also to observe all that He commanded (Matt. 28.20).

*d. Publicizing the Core Group Gathering for Study or Worship:*

In countries where it is not legal or safe to publicize a Christian gathering, the missionary will have to spread the word very carefully and privately. However, in countries where it is both legal and safe to advertise a Christian gathering, the missionary will want to use every available means to inform as many people as possible that at a certain time and place the Word of God is going to be proclaimed to all who wish to come. The mission work should seek to use the following means of advertisement: local TV and radio; social media and an internet site for the church; printed fliers that can be posted in public places; postcards that can be mailed to surrounding residences. Bible conferences can also be a very helpful means of getting the word out that a new church is being established in the area. But of course word of mouth remains the most effective means of bringing the truth to people, and eventually bringing people into the church where they will hear more of the truth.

*e. Always Evangelizing and Training in Evangelism:*

For this reason, the missionary must continually practice personal evangelism, and should take every opportunity to invite his neighbors to gather with the core group for Bible study or for the worship of God. Since he must be an example to the rest of the saints, they should see him reaching out to others, and they should be able to join him the work so that he can give them hands-on training in evangelism to their neighbors. He will also want to encourage the members of the core group to do all they can to let their friends, family and neighbors know about the ministry of the mission work. It will be vital for the establishment of a healthy church that the disciples get caught up in God's mission of bringing His saving truth in Christ to lost sinners (Phil. 2.14-16; 1 Thes. 1.6-10; 1 Pet. 2.9-12).

4. Assessing the Spiritual Maturity of the Core Group:

As the missionary engages continually in teaching and training, he must also try to gauge that the disciples are in fact growing in some concrete ways. The saints should demonstrate a love for God's Word and a firm knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness (Phil. 1.9-11; Col. 1.9-10; Titus 2.11-14). Godliness will be especially evident in their active love for one another (Rom. 12.9-13; Gal. 6.10; Phil. 2.1-4; Col. 1.4). The authenticity of their piety will be clear from their regular attendance to the means of grace (Heb. 10.25), their practice of continual prayer (Eph. 6.18; Col. 4.2f), their desire to

evangelize the unbelieving (Col. 4.5f; 1 Pet. 3.15f); their willingness in giving financially for the support of the Gospel ministry (Gal. 6.6; Phil. 4.15ff); their cheerfulness in giving financially for the relief of the poor among them (1 Cor. 16.1f; 2 Cor. 8-9); and their practice of discipleship in the home (Eph. 6.4). Eventually, the maturity of the saints should also be evident in their possessing men who may one day serve as ordained leaders in the church (Acts 14.23; 1 Tim. 3.1-13; Titus 1.5-9).

#### 5. Training National Leaders for the Mission:

If the mission work is ever to organize as a particular congregation, it will need to have mature men who will serve as the church's national leaders for years to come. While it is wrong to ordain a recent convert (1 Tim. 3.6; 5.22), it is never too soon for the missionary to begin praying and looking for men who exhibit something of that spiritual maturity and gifting that pertain to ordained service – godly men who in their words and deeds manifestly love God, his Word, his people, and those who are still perishing in sin. It may take many years to find and train a national man who can serve as minister of the Word and sacraments; but within the first few years of the mission work, the missionary should be able to train at least a couple men to serve as elders or deacons.

It is often necessary for the missionary to form a mission “steering committee” that will assist him in various practical matters (upkeep of the meeting facility; transportation of members; planning/execution of fellowship and outreach events; collection and distribution of financial gifts; service projects to church members and to their neighbors). The missionary will naturally look for competent men who will cheerfully serve in this capacity; but of course such service will also provide the missionary an opportunity to test these men. If they serve faithfully, they may begin at least to demonstrate, both to the missionary and to the rest of the saints, that they are called by God to serve as elders or deacons in the church.

When he believes that he has possibly identified such men, the missionary should not only encourage them to aspire to the noble calling of ordained service (1 Tim. 3.1), but also begin to mentor these men well beyond the regular discipleship he provides for others. In addition to the testing they will receive as members of the steering committee and by various other means, they should also be given a thorough education in the Bible, Reformed confessions, ecclesiology (the offices of the church in particular), and the care of souls. Their growth in knowledge and spiritual maturity should be evident in their speech, and should bear fruit in their loving outreach to people both within and outside of the church.

#### **E. Phase 5 – Developing an Exit Strategy**

When is a mission work completed? This question is usually not easy to answer because each mission field is unique, and the circumstances can vary greatly. There is quite often a tension between leaving too early and staying too long. Nevertheless, a mission work is essentially ready for its missionary to leave when it has organized as a congregation with

its own national leadership, and it has integrated into a national Reformed denomination. This should be our end-goal for our foreign church-plants.

There may be, however, extenuating circumstances when the missionary may have to come off the field before the mission church has organized. In consultation with the Missions Committee, the sending church is responsible to determine what they will do to replace a man if the urgent need arises. (This is why working in teams is essential; team members can possibly step in for a time to cover in the absence of a fellow missionary.) If a missionary foresees his need to come off the field ahead of time, he should communicate this in a timely fashion so that his church can begin the process of looking for another man to replace him. Unforeseeable circumstances would be sickness, family emergencies, or real threats to his person or family. Foreseeable circumstances would include family needs, a call to another work, or retirement.

Another possible scenario is that, after working in a place for a time, there is little visible fruit in the mission work. The missionary, his team, and the sending church should regularly evaluate the viability of the work. This is not to be a matter of impatience or unbelief, but rather a careful consideration of whether we are wisely and effectively using the time and resources that the Lord has granted. The Synodical Missions Committee and the Missions Coordinator should also be consulted in a question such as this, since a decision to close a work affects the federation as a whole. If a decision is made to close a field, the missionary could then entertain a call to another place of service within the federation.

Policies regarding exit strategies should be agreed upon by all parties before the missionary embarks on his task and should include financial planning and provision for handling the logistics of a returning missionary family. (See Part E of General Guidelines for Foreign Missions, below)

### **III. *General Guidelines for Foreign Missions***

#### **A. Guidelines for Furloughs**

Sending Consistories need to give careful consideration to the matter of furloughs – scheduled, mandatory breaks that the missionary will have from the field so that he and his family can return home, (particularly, to their sending church). Traditionally, returning home for a furlough or home-assignment has been considered a normal and necessary part of a missionary endeavour. It is generally recommended that a missionary have a furlough of six to twelve months for every three or four years of service on the field (or one to two months for each year of service). The reasons for furloughs are as follows:

- to give the missionary and his family a break from the field so that they may get some rest and refreshment, and reconnect with their culture;
- to help the missionary and his family remain connected to their extended family, friends, and supporting churches;



- to provide the missionary's children with an opportunity to benefit from socialization in their native culture, and/or to pursue education;
- to provide opportunity to the sending church to evaluate the work that has been done on the field, and to make plans for the future;
- to provide the missionary with various opportunities throughout the federation to share the expertise he has gained through his labors;
- to provide an opportunity for any medical or other major personal matters to be addressed while at home;
- to allow time for the missionary to gain further professional development.

It is important for a clear understanding regarding furlough to be achieved between the missionary and his overseeing Consistory. For a missionary working alone in a country, finding a replacement during his absence could be so difficult that his Consistory will decide to grant a furlough only when possible and absolutely necessary. In any event, it is essential that the work on the field not be left unattended while the missionary is called home. For the sake of providing missionaries with regular and profitable furloughs, the following are recommended:

1. that the overseeing Consistory work with its missionary to determine a practicable plan and policy regarding furloughs;
2. that the overseeing Consistory take care of the missionary's practical needs while he is on furlough (travel, housing, transportation, etc.);
3. that the overseeing Consistory assist the missionary in structuring his time away from the field (e.g. scheduling visits and presentations to be made to churches);
4. that the missionary be encouraged to take courses that would help him in his own spiritual growth and in his labor on the mission field;
5. that the spiritual and educational needs of missionary's wife and children be properly addressed during their furlough;
6. that the overseeing Consistory and missionary use the furlough in part to evaluate the mission work, and to make specific plans for the coming term.

## **B. Guidelines for Compensation**

Well in advance of sending their missionary and his family to the foreign field, the following matters must be carefully investigated and determined.

1. Salary: Cost of living varies greatly depending on the place of service.
2. Vacation: Four weeks of vacation, plus time for travel to and from the field.
3. Missions Conference
4. Housing Allowance
5. Vehicle Allowance
6. Healthcare & Life Insurance
7. Mission Expenses: rent for the church; utilities; diaconal causes; travel; etc.
8. Passport/Visa (other legal papers): consult with an immigration lawyer.
9. Immunization: which is needed for the particular geographical region.
10. Medical Examination: a complete physical with the doctor's written clearance.

### **C. Guidelines for Working Relations with Other Missionaries**

Due to our sinful nature and Satan's efforts to ruin the church, it is important that neighboring missionaries have an understanding of one another which will help them to maintain a loving and fruitful working relationship.

1. Guarding against Conflict: Carefully defined roles and a proper understanding of authority structures will go a long way in helping missionaries to guard against conflict while working together on the same field. Specific responsibilities as to what is expected from each person should be laid out. At all times we must strive to maintain peace without sacrificing principle.
2. Confronting Wrongdoing: If the conduct or teaching of a missionary on the field is contrary to Scripture, fellow missionaries are under obligation to confront the offender for the sake of his own soul, and to inform the overseeing body for sake of the mission. When it is necessary to admonish a brother or sister, the confrontation should take place only after much prayer and careful consideration so that Satan will not be able to work division and disruption (Gal. 6.1-5; Eph. 4.26-27). All parties are obligated to follow the steps for discipline laid out in Matt. 18 and outlined in the Church Order.
3. Working with Minors and with the Opposite Gender: Special care must be given to avoiding even the appearance of evil. The missionary should not counsel or have Bible studies alone with women, nor should his wife counsel men alone. They should also be careful about how they minister to children and young people. It is wise in general for people of opposite gender to meet only in visible, public places.

### **D. Guidelines for Crisis Situations**

1. War or Civil Disruption: Extreme caution should be taken not to become involved in the politics of the country, but it is important at the start to register with one's consulate or embassy in the host country. If a serious political or legal disruption arises, the missionary should be in contact with his embassy, and carefully heed its advice in all things lawful.
2. Kidnapping and extortion: It is the general practice of most churches and missions organizations not to pay a ransom to those who kidnap someone in the missionary family. Consistories should consult with the Missions Coordinator for specific directives that are available for dealing with a case of kidnapping.
3. Sudden death: In the event of a death on the field, the family and church should be notified immediately, representatives from both should be flown to the field, and the life insurance company should be contacted. There must also be a

decision made as to the place of burial. It is important that these matters are specifically addressed before the missionary is sent.

## **E. Guidelines for Preparing Young People for Mission Work**

As we seek to be faithful to the Great Commission by sending labourers into the harvest, it is essential that we properly prepare our men for service on the foreign field. The following guidelines for this preparation are given with church planters in mind. However, men and women sent to serve in other capacities will also benefit from giving attention to applicable sections.

### **1. Church Youth:**

At the level of the local church it is important that we foster among the youth an interest and involvement in missions and evangelism. When our children and young people experience the joy of serving the Lord at home, they will likely consider the possibility of serving the Lord on the mission field. We can foster more missions interest and involvement among the youth by:

- developing church ministries where young people can serve, and gain hands-on experience that will help them develop their gifts;
- maintaining a pulpit ministry that emphasizes the importance of evangelizing the lost, and being involved in missions;
- educating the church youth about God's use of missionaries throughout history for the expansion of his church;
- educating about the federation's missions, and making every effort to have missionaries visit our churches and homes for personal interaction;
- organizing short-term mission trips so that the youth can experience what God is doing, and even participate (see "Guidelines for Short-Term Mission Teams," below).

### **2. Seminary Students:**

Men who sense the Lord calling them to preach and teach on the mission field need to maintain that focus with the help of their home church and seminary. This can be accomplished by:

- choosing a study track that focuses on missions and a foreign language;
- taking internships on the mission field during summer months;
- involving the student in a mentoring relationship with a missionary;
- exploring a specific mission field, and making tentative plans for service at some point after graduation (this is not premature, as it can take years to build a team on a particular field).

In order to be able to consider the possibility of serving on the foreign field, the seminary student interested in foreign missions must have the full support of his wife; moreover, she must be given a good measure of encouragement and education during these years. Wives of seminary students should in some way be involved not only in correspondence with their home church and mentor but also in relevant seminary course work.

## **F. Guidelines for Short-Term Mission Teams**

1. STM teams should be organized at the request of the missionary and/or the calling church to meet a specific need on the field.
2. Potential team members should be those who have shown godly character, and who are recommended by their Consistory. Prior to their applying to a team, their commitment to evangelism should have been demonstrated through their activity in their home church.
3. In order to avoid giving offense on the foreign field, prior to their departure team members should learn some key words and phrases in the foreign language which will help them communicate about essentials; they should also be instructed about some basic cultural norms.
4. It is important that, prior to departure, team members check with the missionary concerning the use of alcohol and tobacco on the field.
5. Individuals desiring to participate in a STM trip should be expected to pay a large percentage of the cost of the trip, and possibly fund-raising for the rest.
6. The STM team and missionary must determine in advance the specific objectives and a clear plan of activities that will allow them most profitably to coordinate their work.
7. Upon arrival on the field, proper time should be given to orientation; a time of debriefing should take place at the conclusion of the trip.
8. For work teams, care must be exercised not to take away work opportunities from local people. Ideally, foreign and local workers should work together. This helps the national church to take responsibility for the project.
9. Training of leadership and delegation of responsibilities should be done prior to departure.
10. STM teams will typically focus on helping youth to witness in the culture they are visiting; but it is important for the young people to be encouraged to carry on their service and witness back in their home church.
11. STM teams should be prepared to give a presentation of their experience in their home church upon their return so that the entire church can benefit from the experience.