

NURTURING FUTURE
MISSIONARIES

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Do you have a plan for when a person indicates they may be sensing God's call to the nations? Does your church desire to be proactive in sending people to the nations? There are some significant benefits to being proactive as you posture your church towards sending out your members.

Over the years I have observed some fruitful trends in proactive sending churches:

1. Churches that have a pipeline to mobilize, equip, and send their members to the nations tend to have more Sent Ones.

2. Churches that are involved in the entire process of mobilization, equipping, and caring for their Sent Ones tend to have missionaries with a strong connection to their sending church.

3. Churches that are involved in cultivating the calling of their Sent Ones and discipling and equipping them to go have built a lot of trust with the missionary, which puts them in a great position to provide healthy care for them while they are serving.

4. Churches that have invested much in their missionaries and care for them deeply while they are on the field tend to have Sent Ones who return home healthy. They are able to come back and integrate into the life and community of the church and use their experience to further the church's mission.

The purpose of this resource is to help you as a mission leader in the beginning phase of helping your members navigate a call to the nations. I call this phase "nurturing" the calling. It is often overlooked by the church, but the investment you make at this stage sets the course direction for your Sent Ones.

As a mission leader in your church, nurturing potential Sent Ones is an important part of your job. It takes commitment and time on your part, but it will also likely be one of the most rewarding aspects of your ministry.



IDENTIFYING SOME

Assumptions

The mobilization approach of most churches leans towards a broad call to the entire congregation to get involved in missions. There is nothing theologically incorrect about this. It's good to encourage your entire church body toward involvement in missions as you make them aware of opportunities and invite them to participate in the missions efforts of the church.

However, from a practical standpoint, when the call is broad, it leads towards the sociological pitfall of thinking, "Someone else will do it." The more effective option seems to be implementing a targeted approach. To this end, a sending church should establish some general mission awareness, create a set of guiding mission convictions for your church, develop a vision for sending and a strategy for where you sense the Holy Spirit leading your church on mission, and discover the mobilization pools in which you will find the right people to consider going overseas. This targeted approach will be more effective for mobilizing your members towards the places and people your church is seeking to reach. You can read more about these first phases of sending in Upstream's [Sending Church Elements Booklet](#).



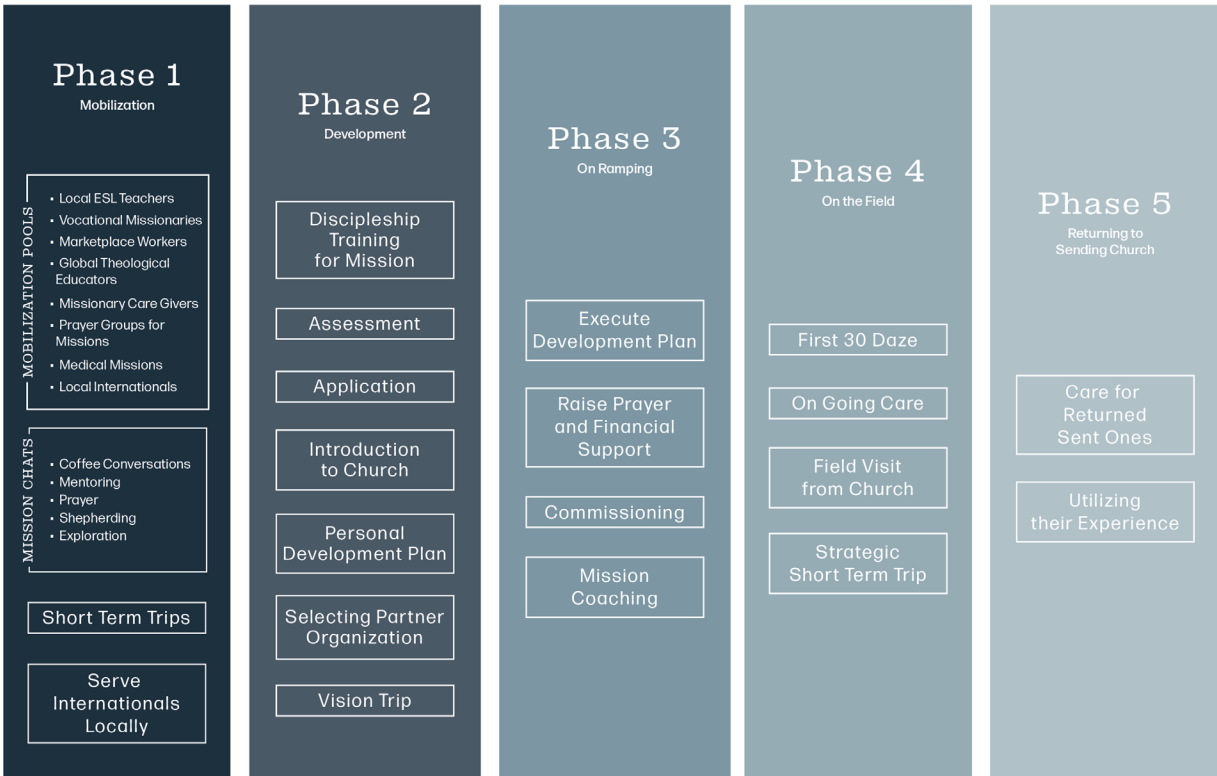
Once you have set the culture of sending in your church and have an established plan for what sending looks like, you can lay it out on a continuum or develop a pipeline that shows every step in the process. This is your guiding tool. You simply start putting these pieces in place for your church.

Below, I want to give you some points of interest that you should address in the early phases of mobilization.





SENDING CONTINUUM



While mission organizations and receiving fields provide some quality and tangible resources, we do not want the church to rely on this approach alone to mobilize people. We desire to see the church be the first point of contact for a potential Sent One and not a conference they attend or a video they watch. God can certainly use these things to grow one’s heart for missions, but we believe calling and sending should be nurtured within the context of the local church.

HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

Step 1: Creating Mobilization Pools

Who are the mission-activated people in your church?
You probably could list them right now.

You will most likely have some people already serving in missions locally and globally, maybe more than you realize. As mentioned in the intro, our tendency is to cast the mobilization net wide rather than targeting those who already have a disposition and giftedness towards going overseas. It's important to cast the net wide, but it is equally, if not more, important to use a targeted method as well.

Speaking of casting a net, I have always liked fishing. I am not very good at it, but I do love the excuse to be outdoors. I am also fascinated with reality shows about people who fish for a living. They often cast nets hoping to catch more than one fish. They know what type of fish they are looking to catch, and they know when and where to cast the net and how deep to drop it.

Several of the disciples of Jesus were fishermen, including Peter. Jesus gave them instructions one time about where to cast their net.

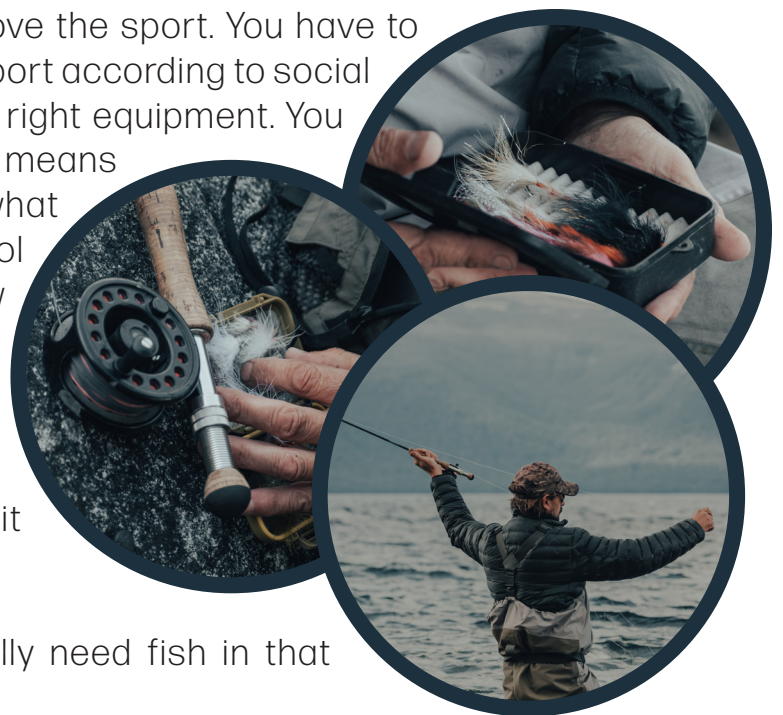
John 21:1-6

¹Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ²Simon Peter, Thomas [also known as Didymus], Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁶He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

I am a wannabe fly fisherman. I love the sport. You have to have the right look (it is a stylish sport according to social media), and you have to have the right equipment. You need to use the right flies, which means you need to know the season, what flies are actually native to that pool of water you are fishing, and how they are hatching.

You must also have skill. You need to have precision in your cast. You need the fly to look natural when it lands on the water.

And most importantly, you actually need fish in that pool.



Fly fishing isn't a perfect metaphor for sending, but I do think we can draw some comparisons. Just like fishermen need to know what's in the pool they're fishing, mission leaders need to know the people who make up the "pool" of our church.

For example, are there many people in ...

- education
- sports
- the arts
- health care
- counseling
- etc.

For our purposes, are there people who already show a desire to be on mission? Consider people who may already be going on trips, serving in the community, or actively praying for mission and missionaries. These people are already missionally activated, and these are the people I want to send short-, mid-, and long-term to places we are already engaging or want to engage in missions. I like to group these people so that I can better focus on moving them to the next level of mission involvement. These do not have to be organized groups that meet regularly but simply identifiable groups of people with common interests, experiences or skills. I am more interested in cultivating these groups of mission-activated people. Grouping my missionally activated members gives me what I call "mobilization pools."

After you've formed these pools, you will need to determine what the best way is to engage these men and women in mission mobilization. You may try to meet with these groups on a regular basis if they already have an interest in missions or if you have a trip you are trying to enlist people for or a local ministry you need volunteers to serve with. You can do this the old-fashioned way and create a spreadsheet to keep up with your mobilization pools, or if your church has a contact management system, you may be able to "tag" them and then simply pull up those tags as needs arise. However you go about it, it is helpful for you to identify your mobilization pools and the people who are in them.

Some of the people who are in these pools and who have been activated towards missions will begin processing a calling to the nations. Hopefully, you are regularly giving people opportunities to think about God's call on their life. If so, you are a step ahead. Most churches simply wait for this to happen and then reactively put people into a process or send them to a mission agency. As you can tell, we are proponents of the church taking

responsibility for cultivating this calling.

For those who have even the slightest indication that God is calling them to the nations, we encourage you to build out some systems that will help you cultivate this calling. Here is a process I have found to be helpful in cultivating one's calling towards missions.

HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

Step Two: The Monthly Mission Chat

The “monthly mission chat” (or whatever you desire to call it) would happen during the normal rhythm of an academic school year.

The purpose of this chat is to provide a safe place for people to start processing their calling. If you have couples (married or engaged), I would strongly encourage both to attend. It gives the husband and wife a chance to process and progress together. You want to ask hard questions, talk about difficult subjects, and process basic logistical questions about living abroad. There should be no shame in a person attending for a few months and then realizing this is not where they need to be at this point and time in their life.

People need the time and space to process their calling. Projecting shame or disappointment if they decide not to go is never helpful. It is the Holy Spirit who calls, not you projecting on them a sense that they have to go. None of us would do that intentionally, but I do believe we sometimes get caught up in the excitement of God calling a person to the nations and forget that it's possible for God to reveal that he's leading them in a different direction. When they realize the doors may not actually be open for them, they may feel shame over having “let you down.” This should never be the case. During this exploration phase, we need to give space for people to pray, contemplate, and converse about going without feeling pressure from us to go.

A great benefit of the mission chat is that you can begin to mobilize a group of people from your church who desire to go to the nations. They may even begin a group that goes deeper in their missions efforts or mobilize into a mission team that repeatedly visits the same locations. This is where they start realizing it is the Spirit who is calling them as the church affirms and facilitates that calling.

I like to see these mission chats taking place in a home or somewhere that is more casual. If possible, try to provide childcare for younger children. If

they have older children or teens, it would be great to include them since the entire family is moving abroad.

Here is an example from Brett Martin, who is a pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Corbin, Kentucky.

We get together at my house for our monthly mission chats, welcoming those from each campus [Richmond, Williamsburg, and Corbin]. We share a very simple meal, which most of the time consists of international foods. We have all our information for short-term trips on hand for those who are interested. We pray for our missionaries, look into scriptures, and discuss overseas long-term missions in a way that can be applicable in their discipling relationships right now. We interview a missionary in-person or via Zoom and give a chance for people to do a Q&A.

POTENTIAL AGENDA FOR A MISSION CHAT

1. Eat - Serve foods from around the world. Build community.
2. Pray - Pray for missions around the world or in your focus areas as a church. Pray for your missionaries and partners.
3. Discuss - Choose a Mission Topic - Choose a topic that could help them think through various aspects of a mission calling and life overseas.

You may choose to lead some of these topics, as we did since we had overseas experience and raised a family overseas. However, if you do not have overseas experience, you shouldn't feel unqualified to lead the chat. You have an important role to play as you navigate their calling alongside them.

There are most likely other people in your church who could also do well facilitating a conversation. Seeking to incorporate more people is always beneficial for cultivating missions awareness in your church and involving every member. I would also recommend having someone who can use their home to host the mission chats so you can fully focus on directing conversations and building relationships.

When your overseas partners or missionaries come to visit, try to include them in a mission chat. People who sense God is calling them to the nations love to hear from and ask questions to people who currently live on the field. Giving your missionaries an opportunity to speak back into the life of the church is also a great way to practice another of our Sending Church Elements—Inviting Sent Ones' Influence.

In between in-person chats, you may also want to do a video meeting with people on the field if the timezone difference works out.

POTENTIAL TOPICS FOR YOUR FIRST YEAR OF MISSION CHATS

- What it's like to learn another language
- A typical day as a missionary
- Raising children cross-culturally
- Schooling your children overseas
- Choosing a mission sending organization
- How to determine where God is leading you
- Adapting to a new culture
- Necessary missionary skills to develop
- What church looks like in another culture
- If and when to take a vision trip and what to look for if you do
- Talking to your parents and other family members about moving overseas
- Talking to your children about going overseas
- Possible barriers to going overseas

HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

Step Three: Have Ongoing Conversations with the Potential Sent One

This is a critical step. It will take an investment of your time, but you will not regret it.

It is an important part of the shepherding process to prepare an individual, couple, or family for moving overseas. The process may take a year or more, but you can do it. You now have a list of people you know you need to cultivate. It is probably a short list and one that you can relationally manage. Cultivating relationships with potential

Sent Ones was my favorite part of being a mission pastor. My wife and I loved being actively involved in pouring into the lives of people who were sensing a call to missions.

You will need to determine the best way to keep up with the list of people who attend your mission chat. I simply created a note in my phone with everyone on my list. I would check in with them if I did not hear from them, and I gave them permission to reach out and ask me anything or set up a time to talk.

It is important not to push too hard and to let them take the initiative in the process. You never want to be the one driving a person into missions. *Your role is to help process and facilitate what God is already doing in their heart.*

To build your relationship with your members who are considering missions, you could have coffee with them and give them a chance to process more. In other cases you may want to disciple them more intentionally to help prepare them to be cross-cultural disciple makers. One mission pastor spent time every week with a senior in college, and they studied the Bible together and talked through how to teach the Bible to people of other cultures. As a result, that young man is now one of the best missionaries I know, and I chalk it up to the investment his pastor made in him and the initiative this man took to prepare to live abroad.

You should always encourage people in your pipeline toward a next step (while also giving them space to slow down or back out). When someone is giving you the green light, it's important to call them to the next step of action, such as:

- Serving in the mission area of your church
- Serving internationals in your city
- Attending an international church in your city

Your role is to help process and facilitate what God is already doing in their heart.



- Participating in a short-term mission trip
- Attending prayer times for missions at your church
- Being part of a deeper missions study in your church or city

These are great call-to-action steps that will also help in processing one's call as you debrief with them along the way, and they are significant steps of preparation for the future missionary.

HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

Step Four: Encourage Them towards Involvement in Local Cross-Cultural Work

Identify opportunities in your city where your potential Sent One can invest deeply into ministry that will develop them for cross-culture work. Not only will this develop them personally, but it will also aid in the mission efforts of your church locally.

This could look like:

- Working with a church in your city that is made up of people from other nations
- Ministering to internationals or refugees
- Serving in a church that does not have English as their first language
- Serving in an ESL program in your city
- Connecting them with a person from another culture for disciple-making and relating to someone different than them

When I look back on my preparation,
I wish I would have done more of these
formative activities early on.



HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

Step Five: Mission Education / Equipping

As a person continues in their sense of calling, it is good to develop their theology of missions. There are some great resources out there that are proven and helpful. I will mention two of them. The [Perspectives on the World Christian Movement](#) course is the most well-known resource for understanding God's heart for the nations. It does require a significant time commitment, but it is well worth the investment. The Perspectives class requires a host group and a location to meet. It can be a big undertaking, but it is worth it to help potential Sent Ones understand the nature of missions and what it is they would be called to.

If your church has several people in your pipeline, then I would highly recommend a resource by Nathan Sloan titled [You Are Sent](#). He used this for many years at Sojourn Church, where he was the Mission Pastor. It is a proven resource in the church.

You might also choose to write your own. For Upstream Members, we have an "[Intro to Missions](#)" class template on our website that can help with this. Whether you create your own program or plug into another, the important thing is to choose one that will fit well into your pipeline.



HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

Step Six: Encourage Them with Short-Term or Mid-Term Mission Opportunities Abroad

Your mission candidates may have already been involved with short-term trips. Short-term trips are great for providing exposure to cross-cultural work and determining how God is leading. We are all for taking them as a church if they are strategic for your field partners. If you have places where you are regularly going, then be sure to invite those in your pipeline to go on a trip or two. In fact, I would invite them to go on a trip that you are going on yourself. Going together gives you the added benefit of being able to spend a lot of time with them and observe them in a cross-cultural setting. It is a way also for you to speak into their development as a potential cross-cultural worker.

If they are in a season of life to do so, another option is to have them go to a place to live and serve for one to three months or even a year. This gets them beyond a

short-term trip, where it's possible for things to go really well for a week, into a situation where most likely they will face some adversity and culture shock. Talk with your global partners and see if they have needs for long-term workers. If not, or if you do not have any global partners, many sending organizations will have opportunities for them to plug into. This model works well for younger people or retirees but is typically harder for families unless they are able to work remotely.

If you have university students considering missions, encourage them to study abroad or do their education abroad. They could plug into a local church or mission team that can provide them community, accountability, and strategic direction.

A young woman in the city where we currently live sensed a call to missions in her senior year of high school. She turned down a scholarship at a school in the States to do all of her undergraduate work abroad in our city. She then connected to a church near her university. She found some people to disciple and mentor her. She plugged into her church as she continued to learn the local language. She began to disciple young women in her church and started to serve in various ways. She graduated from university but sensed the Lord wanting her to stay here, so she found a job and is now working in the city in a field that she loves. She continues to share her faith and disciple others and remains deeply involved in her local church, which she continues to rely on for community, accountability, and direction.



HOW DO YOU DO THIS?

Step Seven: Formally Invite Them into the Sending Process

After this season there will come a point where you affirm what God is doing in their life. This step involves formally asking them to apply to become a Sent One from your church.

The decision to apply is one they will need to make. It is their commitment to a calling and your commitment to facilitating that call as a church. They must make the decision to go, and if they do, they will be your Sent Ones.

In a perfect world, you will have cultivated their calling, provided some training, and even given them some direction along the way. They may or may not know where God is leading them. As a church with a strategy, you have a plan for where you are wanting to be involved, and you have good partners around the world that you are working with. They may be your best receivers for your missionaries. Direct traffic toward those partners.

However, there will usually be an exception. God does call people to places where you are not working. There is nothing wrong with directing traffic and resources to the places where you partner deeply, but at the same time, you don't need to be so rigid that you only send to those places. Leave room to make exceptions for those God is leading to new places. They also are covenant members of your church. While you may not be able to provide the same resources for them, you can pray, care for, and support them as your Sent Ones.

Conclusion

This resource has given you ideas and a process for nurturing a person's calling to the nations. Use it. Improve upon it. We promise you will not regret having a process in place and making the relational investment with people God is calling to live out their faith in a cross-cultural setting.

