



THE CHURCH »

The means and end of missions



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

LETTER FROM

The Board President



The Biblical model of missions is clear. The local church gathered, entered into prayer, and led by the Holy Spirit chose Paul and Barnabas, laid hands on them, and sent them out. Paul and Barnabas planted churches and maintained contact with the Jerusalem church, giving updates, reporting back and even leading others from that body into the field. The center of Great Commission activity was the local church.

Sometime during the past two thousand years, we, as a church, have lost the centrality of the local church in reaching the ends of the earth. Individuals head out from the local church to denominational mission boards, to para-church organizations, or even on their own. The local church sends some support money from a missions fund and maybe gets a report every few years, but it relies on others to do the real work of reaching the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. Along the way, the church lost much of its organizing principle, its reason for being, which is to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

GSI seeks to change that dynamic. We are not superseding the local church’s responsibility. Instead, we come alongside the local church in her task of fulfilling the Great Commission. GSI does this by working alongside the local church to equip church members to serve abroad and to keep the church fully engaged in the task the church is performing overseas. We provide ongoing training and consultants in language learning, Bible translation and church planting. We also provide a financial framework to process gifts to the overseas church members and a network of Christian businesspeople who assist missionaries in creating platforms that allow them to stay long term among the unreached. We also provide regular accountability in the local area where the worker serves as well as accountability to the sending church to ensure the work is done.



It is hard to understate how radical an idea it is today that the local church is the sending organization reaching the world with the Gospel. The refocusing of the task from an outside organization to the local church is transformative. In this newsletter you will read messages from church leaders and from one of our likeminded partners about the task at hand and how truly understanding that the local church is central in reaching the world has transformed churches, believers and individuals called to go into the uttermost parts of the earth. We are excited to share this annual report with you and it is our prayer that your local church would be encouraged to pray about the way that you are involved in living out the Great Commission.

- John L. Moore
President, Global Serve International

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Who is Responsible for What?

WRITTEN BY PASTOR JUSTIN HARRIS • FAITH BIBLE CHURCH, FLORIDA • 2 UNITS SENT WITH GSI

“Who is responsible for what?” Few questions expose the gaps in our Great Commission effectiveness as this one. Though recent history and experience would indicate that this is the task of the denomination, the para-church organization, or the individual believer, the biblical data indicates that the local church deserves prime of place in God’s redemptive plan for humanity. To see this in the Scriptures, let’s consider the key question above but break into two and reverse the order. For what are we responsible? Who is responsible for it?

FOR WHAT ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?

Scripture reveals that Christ commissioned His followers to make disciples of all nations through the preaching of the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). This work was to start in Greek and Aramaic speaking Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria then extend out into every corner of the earth (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Of course, these corners of the earth extended through and beyond the geographical borders of the expansive Roman Empire. So, Jesus at least intended the gospel to do its dynamic work among all lands; but, both Paul’s declaration of intent in Romans and John’s apocalyptic vision clarify that the this gospel would produce disciples among all languages and lineages as well (Rom 1:5, 14; Rev 5:9; 7:9).

Furthermore, Paul’s missionary strategy reflected this, as he aimed to preach Christ where He had not yet been proclaimed (Romans 15:20). With thousands of unreached people groups remaining today, the church must prioritize reaching them. This work often requires sending missionaries to dangerous and challenging places, learning new languages, and committing to long-term labor in

regions where the gospel has yet to take root. Sending missionaries to these people groups is not optional but a matter of obedience to the Great Commission.

So the gospel should spread and disciples should be made among all lands, lineages, and languages. But, how did the apostles understand and interpret the method for making these disciples? Jesus explicitly told them to preach the gospel and then to mark these disciples through baptism in the name of the Triune God and to mature them to obey in everything Jesus’ command, not the least of which was to partake regularly of the Lord’s Supper and to gather together for the teaching of sound doctrine. And where would these essential activities take place? These things would take place as believers in Christ regularly gathered for the preaching of the Word and the right practice of Christ’s ordinances (see Paul’s example in Acts 14:23). These churches became centers of worship, discipleship, and further evangelistic outreach. The establishment of local churches among unreached people groups is, therefore, a central goal of missions.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT?

The Great Commission was not merely given to the original apostles but to the entire church; thus, the church was accountable for sending, supporting, and overseeing the work.

Sending. The book of Acts provides a pattern for the fulfillment of this mission, as the early church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, began to send missionaries to regions and peoples where Christ was not yet known. A clear example of this is found in Acts 13:1-3, where the church in Antioch, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, set apart Paul and Barnabas for missionary work. After fasting, praying, and laying hands on them, the church sent them out. This pattern remains relevant today. Missionaries should not act as independent agents but as representatives of their local church. Thus, Paul reasons in his missionary support letter to the church at Rome that salvation depends upon people believing which depends upon people hearing the gospel which depends upon people being sent to preach (Rom 10:14-15).

Supporting. The local church's responsibility extends beyond sending missionaries; it must also provide ongoing support and accountability. In Philippians 4:15-16, Paul commended the church in Philippi for their partnership in the gospel through financial support. This partnership model applies to the entire church as every member participates in missions through prayer, encouragement, and sacrificial giving.

Overseeing. Additionally, missionaries are accountable to the sending church. The church must ensure that those it sends remain faithful to the gospel and to the biblical model of church planting. In Acts 14:26-27, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to report on all that God had done through them. This mutual accountability helps maintain doctrinal integrity and ensures that the mission work aligns with biblical principles. So, from the example of the early church and the argument of the apostle Paul, the Scriptures place the impetus for the Great Commission upon the local church. Churches, then—more clearly than agencies, denominations, or individuals—are responsible recognizing, equipping, and sending workers to proclaim the gospel and establish churches among every tribe, tongue, and nation. And it is churches who play the most pivotal role in the life of the missionary, offering spiritual and practical support. While various organizations may assist with logistics, the authority and responsibility for sending missionaries ultimately rests with the church.

CONCLUSION

The local church has a clear and compelling responsibility to send missionaries. The Great Commission calls the church to reach all nations, including unreached language groups that have yet to hear the gospel. This responsibility is carried out through the church's direct involvement in sending and supporting missionaries, whose ultimate goal is to plant self-sustaining churches among these people groups. Though the task is great, the church has been equipped by the Holy Spirit and given Christ's promise that He will be with His people until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). As the church embraces its role, it participates in the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for all peoples. And so we pray the timeless words of Isaac Watts early 18th century hymn, "How Sweet and Awful is the Place":

Pity the nations, O our God
Constrain the earth to come
Send Thy victorious Word abroad
And bring the strangers home
We long to see Thy churches full
That all the chosen race
May with one voice and heart and soul
Sing Thy redeeming grace



DEFINING THE TASK:

The Journey of Walnut Creek Church

WRITTEN BY PASTOR GREG ALTMEIER • WALNUT CREEK CHURCH, IOWA • 11 SENT WITH GSI

Walnut Creek Church exists to glorify God by making authentic disciples of Jesus Christ who love and worship Him in all they do.

For years, that has been the mission statement of Walnut Creek Church in Des Moines, Iowa. Throughout those years, the Lord blessed the ministry of the church with salvations, baptisms, worship & fellowship, raising up pastors, domestic church plants and many other things. However, during the first 30 years of the church's existence, no global workers were raised up and sent out from the church. It wasn't the result of a lack of zeal for the Lord, fear of evangelism and discipleship, or apathetic views towards the Scriptures. Rather, it was the reality that the task of the local church to send workers into cross-cultural contexts to plant churches was never a task placed before the saints of Walnut Creek Church. How were the saints to pursue something they didn't know existed? And if that was not a task put before the saints, there would be no strategic initiatives aimed at that task, or mobilization opportunities to help saints gain a heart for that task.

While many church transformations are initiated at the pastor and staff level, this one began in 2013 within the church body, with dozens of saints initially leading the

change to define the task and place it before the Elders. Over time, and by the grace of God, soon Elders, staff and the congregation were all bought into the pursuit of raising up and sending out long term workers.

The next item of development came in 2015, surrounding mobilization and our sending/vetting process. We knew that members of the church would not accidentally find themselves sent overseas, and we also knew that most people would remain on whatever life trajectory they were on unless otherwise moved or impacted. The tension though was that as a church we didn't believe that every person who raised their hand to be sent was qualified, or that after a period of testing everyone who began down the path would still want to live their life overseas.

This tension led us to create a culture and mindset which included many "on-ramps" (ways for people in the church to begin to get involved in missions), and many "off-ramps" (opportunities for those who began to be involved to fold back into the local congregation and not pursue long-term missions work). Some of our most effective mobilization on-ramps consisted of a monthly church-wide prayer for the nations, weekend trips to Engage Global in Minneapolis, and The Missions Course, which we hosted in collaboration with two other area churches. Each of these opportunities provided a low barrier of entry for many in the church who were hearing about missions for the first time and wanted to learn more. At the same time,

participating in any of these endeavors would not lock someone into the title of “future missionary” for the rest of their church life.

For those who took part in these opportunities, and subsequently wanted to take the next step, a 10-week summer program was designed. The program was team-based, led by people with prior cross-cultural experience, and contained prescribed weekly assignments, cross-cultural outreach, and opportunities to discuss what they were learning with the rest of their team. For many who completed the summer program but did not continue on the pathway overseas, they now had built cross-cultural relationships in Des Moines that would be a tremendous blessing in the years ahead.

For those who upon completing the 10-week program wanted to continue to take meaningful steps towards overseas work, a 9-month program was put in place to help them and the elders continue to discern if this was the correct pathway for them. This 9-month program gave them continued opportunities to minister cross-culturally in Des Moines, read and think through various missions material on their own and within their team, and provide additional time for processing and vetting. Soon after, additional theological training requirements followed, along with the design of a 3-4 year pathway for recent college graduates within the church.

In all of these things, we have seen the Lord’s faithfulness. Since 2016, He has faithfully raised up 23 Goers, with 22 of those completing training at Radius International. 11 of those Goers are partnered with Global Serve International. Each year, we learn and grow from mistakes we have made and introduce small tweaks to the program, hoping to better encourage and engage the saints who are pursuing long term church planting work. We have also been trying to grow in how to involve the entire church body in the process of sending and supporting workers overseas. We look forward to all that the Lord will do through the saints in the years to come.





CONNECTIONS CHURCH:

How Defining the Task Shaped Our Church

WRITTEN BY PASTOR BILLY SHIVER • CONNECTIONS CHURCH, VIDALIA, GA • 3 UNITS SENT WITH GSI



Connection Church Vidalia, GA, was planted in 2015. God has blessed us tremendously since the first Connection Church started in Statesboro, GA, in 2008. Currently, we have a network of nine autonomous churches throughout the state. We believe planting healthy churches that focus on intentional discipleship is the best way to get the Gospel to the nations. This is the biblical model, and we have also seen God's faithfulness throughout this process. Although the enemy hates seeing healthy churches being planted, our conviction is that there is nothing more rewarding and fruitful for the Kingdom than this end.

In 2014, I was introduced to Engage Global (EG), a weekend mission training ministry for the church. The 48 hours I spent at EG rocked my world and my whole mission perspective. Before, I had a narrow and incomplete view of what "missions" was and what the "task" still is. I never would have thought that one short trip to a missions training would change how I view church planting and God's mandate to extend His glory amongst all nations. Although learning the truth about missions can

overwhelm most believers, we had two options. Do we sulk in our disobedience and talk about how unrealistic it is that we—a small church in rural Georgia—can make a global difference and keep focusing on local outreach and beefing up our Sundays? Or do we try to organize everything we do as a church and future church plants in line with God's will and our obedience unto the nations, trusting that He will use our faithfulness? By God's grace, we chose the latter.

My conviction was to set our north star on reaching the nations, that in everything we do, reaching the unreached would be in our DNA. We believe that culture is 'what feels normal.' Therefore, we strive to ensure that everyone who joins our church understands God's heart for the nations and our role in this. We want it to be so ingrained in our community that 'to be a part of Connection Church Vidalia is to join in reaching the nations.' We take our responsibility to educate, engage, and provide experiences for our members seriously. Here are a few examples of how we do this:

EDUCATE:

- Children's ministry – where we have missionary highlights and stories on a simple level.
- Youth ministry – time of prayer for the nations and teachings at their level.
- An equipping class that answers this question: *How do I know and play my role in reaching the nations?*

ENGAGE:

- Q & A's on Sundays with missionaries when they are on home assignment.
- Sunday prayer times for our missionaries and the nations

EXPERIENCES:

- Yearly trips to Engage Global, where we prioritize leaders within our church, potential goers, and people God puts on our hearts.
- A discipleship pipeline specifically for potential goers.

Although these examples are not exhaustive, this is an idea of how seriously we take this mandate. We desperately want to be a church God uses mightily for His Glory amongst all nations. In this effort, it can be easy to look for the magic trick that produces missionaries. My challenge to all of you is to consider defining the task for your churches, brothers and sisters. Please do not compare to other churches or be discouraged by where you are or are not in this mobilization process. We serve a big God, and He has a way of doing extraordinary things with ordinary people who love Him and are willing to be obedient.

If you are willing to rise to this challenge, He will use you and your church by God's grace. After all, He's waiting for us to join Him, not the other way around.





How the Church Trains for the Task of Missions

WRITTEN BY BROOKS BUSER • PRESIDENT OF RADIUS INTERNATIONAL

Churches intuitively know that if they're going to send someone to an unreached language group, the people they send must have more training than the local church typically provides.

Churches are the primary trainers for primary things. Theology Proper, Ecclesiology, what does a church look like, how does it function, and hundreds of other things are best taught and caught at the local church. But what of some of the skill sets that are specific to the task of cross-cultural missions, where the gospel has not gone before? Is there a way to get a low-cost preview of how workers might function on the field? And because going to an unreached language group is so specific, how can churches find other churches that share the same vision, and maybe even have some valuable experience to share? These key areas are where Radius training has been serving the local church for 13 years, and by God's grace, we have seen encouraging outcomes from our training.

Over the years I've seen three primary ways that Radius has been able to serve local churches in a unique way.

TRAINING IN SPECIALIZED SKILLS

Very few churches have someone on staff that can teach things like: Linguistics, People Group Assessment, Bible Translation Principles, Pre-Evangelism, Missionary Finances, How to Raise Normal MKs, and dozens of other ministry-specific topics. Those types of skills, so incredibly necessary in working with unreached language groups, are specialized. Very few people in the world have practiced them and can speak authoritatively on them. One of the most common markers of those who "make it" on the field and those who don't is training. There is less of a jolt when someone has a box, a category, or a familiarity with something complex they encounter on the field because they have been trained to recognize a particular challenge and have the knowledge of how it's overcome. Training matters. The military knows this, the medical community knows this, the aviation community knows this. Every job on earth that deals with human life knows that further training in specialized fields matters greatly. So much more so the Christian who is going where no gospel foundation exists.



VETTING, BEFORE THEY GET TO THE FIELD

Not everyone who wants to be a cross-cultural missionary should be. This is not a reflection of someone's walk with God or maturity level, rather, it's an acknowledgement that our God has made us all differently. The toll that pioneer church planting takes on a marriage, parenting, and on the physical, mental and spiritual body is unlike any other ministry I know of. Not everyone is built for that, and there's no shame whatsoever in recognizing that reality. Churches can, and should, weigh in on whether someone has the baseline gifts and abilities to potentially conduct ministry for 20-30 years overseas, often in a hostile environment. But there are certain aspects of a person's gifting and doggedness that are hard to discern in their home environment. For 13 years Radius has been able to assess a potential missionary over the 9 months of training, in a cross-cultural location, and give their sending church an objective assessment on how they do at: learning a language, handling stress, leading and following well, working with others, marriage, parenting, singleness, and a handful of other metrics that churches do well to know before they send their member overseas.

A NETWORK THAT WORKS TOWARD THE SAME GOAL

Churches should work with other churches to see the Great Commission accomplished. Some are further down the path at raising up their own members to go to the nations, some are blessed with more resources, some are blessed with years of experience in seeing their own members work among an unreached language group overseas. By working with other churches, and agencies that keep the church primary, a church can vault over years of the learning curve and benefit from ground that others have already traversed. In every new class at Radius, we welcome at least 15-30 new churches that are sending out their first members to go to the last languages of the world that have no gospel and no church. What a comfort and blessing it is to find likeminded churches that can give them some guidance and walk with them as they begin this complex but gratifying journey.

Para-church ministries are the handmaiden to the Bride, and nothing should take the place of the Bride. For centuries churches have benefited from seminaries and Bible schools in helping them equip their members for better, more fruitful service to the King. In the same vein, as more churches think through how to better prepare their members for the rigor of cross-cultural church planting, many are concluding that specialized training and vetting is of vital importance for the task of missions in our day.



Meet the Sagso People

COMPILED BY MARK NELSON

When we think about unreached language groups, it's easy to forget that those who live within those populations are people, just as real as we are. They have families, dreams, struggles, and hopes. These men, women, and children belong to unique cultures and speak languages that might be unfamiliar to us, but we all have one thing in common — sin and our need for the savior, Jesus Christ. Please pray for the people below who are part of the Sagso people in SE Asia. Pray with us that the Lord will grant them sight to believe. He is their only hope.

KARL & STAR

Karl is just a couple of years younger than I am. He is a welder who used to work for me, taking care of my welding needs at the virgin coconut oil factory. He is part of a more traditional group of people who go to the mosque every evening to chant for over half an hour, showing their devotion to God. He seems proud of his faithfulness to carry out his religious obligations. I don't know his wife, Star, well, other than that she is quiet and likes to be at home. Karl recently made her a juice stand outside their house so that she could blend up and sell juice to passers-by.

EMMANUEL & SHELLY

Emmanuel is a handy electronics repairman, which is impressive, considering that he has never studied formally. He is a generous man but is quite opposed to thinking that his worldview may be mistaken. He once told me that anyone who converts will go straight to hell. Shelly, his wife, is a hard worker. She is now pregnant with their third child, but that doesn't seem to stop her from her work in making charcoal alongside her household chores.

JACK & ROSEMARY

Jack & Rosemary are in their mid-thirties. Jack is a very handy builder with a reputation as a fast and quality worker. I recently hired him to renovate the virgin coconut oil factory and hope to hire him again soon for another project. Rosemary recently gave birth to their second child, a boy this time. Jack is excited to have an apprentice to help at the work site in a few years. Until then, their oldest daughter, a sharp little girl, will be able to help to watch her baby brother.

Thank you for remembering these six friends of a GSI worker abroad.

Dear Fellow Worker,

Hearing about the lives of the six friends in the Sagso language group helps bring the task of the Great Commission to life. It is not an abstract goal that the church is aiming towards. Instead, our collective efforts affect real people and real communities.

This is why we want to express our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering partnership with those serving abroad, such as the two families living among the Sagso people and those serving stateside. When we envision the intricate process of healthy church planting among unreached language groups, we can imagine a set of gears, each with a unique size and function, all working together. You are one of those gears. As each gear turns, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it demonstrates how our combined efforts are needed to see healthy churches planted that will glorify God.

If you want to learn more about ways to pray for GSI workers or get involved, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,
GSI Leadership



SENDERS' FORUM FOR PASTORS

The SENDERS' FORUM was designed to give pastors an opportunity to discuss best practices for sending and supporting missionaries with other pastors.

Topics included evaluating potential goers, preparing church planters in your local church, practical church-based field support, and collaborating with sending agencies and other churches.

The overarching goal of the SENDERS' FORUM is to advance the great commission by fostering a culture of active participation in missionary work within the entire church body.



Orientation 2024

We had 20+ new candidates representing many new sending churches at the GSI orientation this past summer. These new goers are already starting to head out to the far corners of the world to language groups who have yet to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ in their language.



► From the Field





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