

Philosophy of Ministry for Anchorage Grace Church (AGC) Missions Ministry¹

Approved by AGC Elder Board 2/11/2024

Mission Statement

The purpose of Missions Ministry at AGC is to carry out the Great Commission by enabling missionaries/organizations to make disciples of Christ throughout the world through evangelism, discipleship, church planting and strengthening, leadership training, and Bible translation through the local church unto the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal Statement

The doctrinal statement of the AGC Missions Ministry is the same as that of AGC. All matters pertaining to issues of biblical doctrine, theology, and ministry methodology are subject to the final decision of the elder board of AGC.

Purpose for This Document

This document shall provide the foundational philosophy of ministry to guide the AGC Missions Ministry in the process of selecting, equipping, sending, and shepherding its missionaries as they endeavor to make disciples of all nations. Given the danger that weak theology and errant doctrine pose in global missions, this document will also serve as a safeguard to provide expectations and accountability for both AGC and its missionaries. It will further provide the biblical and theological framework for AGC's Missionary Handbook and Missions Committee Policy documents. The rationale for this stems from AGC's conviction that every ministry of the church, including missions, should be derived from Scripture.

This document will encourage responsible and consistent decision-making for the AGC Missions Committee. All policies and decisions will be founded on this philosophy of ministry as derived from Scripture, on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and on the responsible research, discussion, and direction of the AGC Elder Board. Every attempt will be made to avoid decisions based upon impulse and pragmatism. In summary, this document will serve to:

1. Enable AGC leadership to determine a clear sense of ministry direction as it commits to be faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures.
2. Bring new AGC Missions Ministry team members up to date, allowing them to quickly familiarize themselves with the ministry.
3. Inform the Board of Elders, the pastoral staff, church members, missionaries, and other interested parties of the principles and practices by which AGC Missions Ministry functions.

A Biblical Theology of Missions (Philosophy of Ministry)

The church is entrusted with the Great Commission given by Jesus to His disciples before His ascension (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:8). With the seriousness of this command comes the temptation

¹ This document has been heavily influenced by the Missionary Handbook produced by Grace Ministries International (GMI). Pages 4–9 have incorporated adapted material directly from the GMI Missionary Handbook.

for pragmatism and a desire to make as many converts as possible as quickly as possible. An accurate view of Christ's expectations for the church in their faithfulness to the Great Commission will help to provide the goal for a missions ministry vision and the boundaries which the church should avoid. The following theological points from Scripture provide a guide for what a missions ministry should aspire to and what it should reject with all confidence.

Inerrancy, Authority, and Sufficiency of Scripture

The AGC Missions Ministry wholly affirms the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy. The necessity of affirming the sufficiency, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture guides missions ministries and committees in the following ways:

1) To trust in the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture demands a commitment to teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God to proclaim the gospel and guard the flock of God (Acts 20:18–32; 2 Tim. 3:15–17).

2) The commitment to the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture must be written out, affirmed, and clearly articulated in a ministry's philosophy of ministry, policies, and strategy to protect the church from unbiblical methods.

3) To safeguard ministry from developing or supporting an attitude of doubting the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Christ and His Word, it will be necessary for committees/ministries to identify trends in missions that do not hold to the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture.

4) To provide clear standards for discerning a ministry's/person's position on the sufficiency of Scripture. This includes discerning whether a ministry/person fails to articulate clearly a view of the sufficiency, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture, holds an unbiblical view of the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture, is engaged in practices that are not consistent with the biblical mandate of the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture, or partners with or advances other ministries that fall into any of the categories above.

Priority of Preaching and Teaching in Missions

Since Christ and His Word are sufficient and Christ is the Lord of Missions who exercises authority over His Church, His instructions concerning the priority of preaching and teaching in missions are to be obeyed. In Matthew 28:19–20, the risen Lord gave the following command:

“Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Spirit-led advancement of the gospel until all God's elect are gathered from throughout the world is Christ's great purpose (Matt. 28:18-20; John 10:16; Acts 1:8, Rev. 5:9) and will ultimately be fulfilled by Christ (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:9–11; Rev. 19–22). Through missions ministry, the church participates in God's plan on a worldwide scale. Thus, global missions ministry should be a priority of every local church. It is a way in which congregations and individuals submit to the will of God.

Priority of Local Churches in Missions

The book of Acts and the epistles of the New Testament demonstrate the Great Commission's disciple-making endeavor is carried out through the ministry of the local church (Acts 2:43–47; 9:31; 11:26; 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:15). These local churches are responsible to send missionaries “in a manner worthy of God” (3 John 6). Since missionaries are sent as God's representatives, the church is to send them in a way that will honor God in every respect. This means the church should provide support by money, prayers, and other practical means of assistance. In so doing, God is glorified, and the church has the privilege of being a partner with the missionary in spreading the truth (3 John 8).

The pattern of New Testament missions ministry is the proclamation of the gospel with the view of establishing and strengthening self-propagating local churches in regions that have little to no biblical church presence (Rom. 15:14, 18–24). Therefore, the AGC Missions Ministry is committed to sending pastors to evangelize, establish churches, and strengthen churches in such regions through preaching, teaching, and prayer. Furthermore, the goal of these efforts is to establish, train, and equip indigenous pastors to carry on the work of the ministry in their respective regions. Missionaries must seek to pass on the work of the ministry to local church leaders, so it is no longer dependent on missionary service.

Definition of a Missionary

AGC defines a missionary as a servant of Christ called to proclaim the gospel, often across geographical and cultural boundaries, in obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:45-47). Frontier missionaries like the Apostle Paul, aim to take the gospel to people who have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ and do not have access to gospel-preaching churches in their own culture (Romans 15:19-23). Missionaries like Timothy can be assigned to serve where a frontier church needs to be put in order and strengthened to become a mature church (Acts 16:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:3, 18–20).

Qualifications of the Missionary

A person's call to missionary service will be evident by his or her qualifications. A godly character, faithful service in a local church, and an accurate and thorough knowledge of Scripture are key qualifications of a missionary. In addition, those who are sent out as pastors to establish and to lead churches are to meet the biblical qualifications for an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Through prayer, counsel, and observation, the Spirit will lead a church to discern and confirm the qualifications and calling of persons to missions ministry. AGC's Missionary Handbook outlines the guidelines for discerning a missionary's qualifications according to the role he or she seeks to fill.

Ministry Focus of Missionary Candidates

- The Local Church
Each missionary and candidate must be committed to the establishing and strengthening of local churches and the development of local church leadership, both vocational and lay, as exclusive ministry objectives. All decisions regarding mission ministry efforts and resources must be considered in light of these objectives.
- Biblical Discipleship
Each missionary must be actively discipling others and must be committed to the sufficiency of Scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to transform every believer by means of the process of biblical sanctification. Thus, reliance upon non-biblical methodology to deal with spiritual matters in the lives of individuals is unacceptable.

- Expository Preaching

Each man sent as a missionary must be prepared to handle the Word of God in an expository manner. His teaching and pulpit ministry must be expository in nature.

Although Bible translators, marketplace partners, and others who support the preaching and training ministry may not have an ongoing ministry of preaching, they must be able to interpret Scripture accurately and explain it effectively to be considered for support by AGC's mission ministry.

Since the Scriptures are clear that the God-ordained role of women in the church is not to teach men or to pastor, the AGC Missions Ministry does not permit women to fill these roles (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11–12). Nonetheless, women sent out through AGC or supported by AGC for support role ministries must still be capable of interpreting Scripture accurately, proclaiming the Gospel effectively, teaching doctrinal truths to other women and children, and biblically counseling other women and children (Titus 2:3–5).

Responsibility of the Church to the Missionary

The church has a responsibility to pray for, identify, train, and send only those who are qualified to be missionaries. A missionary is ultimately accountable to the authority of Scripture and secondly to the sending church. The missionary serves under the authority of the church (Acts 13:3; 14:26–27). AGC strongly discourages a missionary candidate from pursuing service with a missions agency before seeking the counsel and blessing of his or her church. Missions agencies have a legitimate and useful role in the sending of missionaries by identifying strategic opportunities for service and providing administrative support, specialized training, and on-the-field supervision. However, a missions agency is not a substitute for the church but a partner alongside of the church. For such a partnership to be workable, a missions agency should be in agreement with the church's doctrine and philosophy of ministry.

Sending from the Local Church

Scripture is clear on the importance of the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). Paul writes that the church is "the household of God" and "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 1:22; 4:15–16; 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24). It is through the local church that God accomplishes His work in the world, including missions.

The pattern of the early church is that missionaries were sent from a local church. In Acts 13:1–4, the Holy Spirit worked through the local church in Antioch to send out two of their own teachers as missionaries. As they were sent out from the local church in Antioch, so also the church welcomed them upon their return and allowed the missionaries to give a report of all that God had done (Acts 14:26–28). These passages describe how the early local church sent out missionaries and then maintained a relationship with them through the entirety of their service and is the pattern AGC strives for in its mission ministry.

Furthermore, the local church is the best place to evaluate a potential missionary's character, teaching ability, theological knowledge, and ministry faithfulness (1 Tim. 4:14–15). It is also the local

church that can provide encouragement, counsel, support, and accountability for the missionary while he is ministering and upon his return (Acts 14:26–28). Therefore, it is from the local church that a missionary must be sent and supported.

[Sending to Establish or Strengthen Local Churches](#)

The book of Acts records the continuing work of God after the disciples received the Great Commission and Jesus ascended into heaven. The book of Acts is summarized in Acts 1:8, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” The promise of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. The events that follow the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts is the establishment and growth of the church. Significantly, the book of Acts is the first book of church history and the final book of history in Scripture. The Epistles which follow the book of Acts are letters to the churches or leaders of churches. Therefore, the fulfillment of the Great Commission, as demonstrated in the New Testament, is the planting and strengthening of local churches.

Furthermore, an examination of the Great Commission reveals that the conversion of souls, as important as it is, does not constitute the entirety of Christ’s mission for the church. The salvation of the lost, evidenced by the baptism of new believers, is to be followed by teaching these believers to obey all that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:19–20). The final goal is a community of believers who are taught to glorify God in all of life, a function that happens in the local church. The goal is a local church with indigenous leadership that is self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.

[Self-governing](#)

The New Testament does not authorize the creation of an organizational structure for the universal church. On the contrary, the Scriptures present each local church as having independence, led by the authority of elders within the church (Acts 20:17–28; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). The goal of a missionary is to establish local elders as soon as is biblically wise and practicable.

The local elders will be men of proven character who are above reproach and who are able to teach as described in Matt. 20:25–28, 1 Tim. 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. They will shepherd, lead, teach, encourage, protect, and oversee church discipline where necessary (Matt. 18:15–17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1–4). The church will recognize these men as leaders of the church, honoring and submitting to their authority (1 Thess. 5:12–13; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17).

In many areas, the missionary should not take the senior pastor position in the church but come alongside existing local pastors in order to train and encourage them. The exception to this would be for a man whose goal is to transfer from the role of missionary to local pastor and begin to be supported by the local church where he pastors.

For a man returning from the United States to his country of citizenship, his entrance into the role of a pastor is encouraged. As a pastor, he can lead the church with other elders as he also seeks to disciple other men in the country to pursue church ministry. He will become accountable to other local elders in the church in which he serves.

Self-supporting

A healthy local church is one that obediently, regularly, joyfully, and sacrificially gives to the Lord (2 Cor. 8). This giving is to support those who are responsible for leading and teaching in the church and to meet the needs of the saints (1 Cor. 9:6–14; 2 Cor. 8–9; 1 Tim. 5:17).

The missionary's goal is to encourage the local church to support the leaders of the church as soon as it is biblically wise and practicable. Every effort must be taken so that the local church becomes financially independent from the missionary or churches in the United States. There may be occasions for extraordinary support of the church, such as a natural disaster, but these should be the exception rather than the rule.

For a man returning from the United States to his country of citizenship, the goal would be for the local church to support his ministry as soon as possible. Again, the goal would be for a healthy church that supports its own leaders.

Self-propagating

The Great Commission, which is rightly viewed as Christ's call to missions, was not only given to the church in the West. It is a command given to every church around the world. A healthy local church will recognize the need to spread the gospel and create other autonomous biblical churches. One of the characteristics for which Paul praised the Thessalonian Church is that "the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything" (1 Thess. 1:8).

Indigenous churches must recognize that evangelism is not solely the work of the American missionary, but of every believer. This must begin locally, and with the goal of eventually sending out its own missionaries as well. The local church's embrace of its role in self-propagation will be a clear mark of a truly healthy church and will result in the future growth of Christ's kingdom to the glory of God.

Missionaries Supporting Church Planting

The work of church planting and strengthening not only requires men who are trained to lead and to preach, but also those who will assist them by filling a supporting role in the church planting or training ministry. Those skilled in organizational or administrative tasks, as well as those skilled in other various disciplines, allow the missionary skilled in preaching or training to focus on the tasks God has prepared for him. Therefore, there will be a percentage of missionaries sent out who will fill a supporting role in the missions effort.

Those who fill these support roles will be valued as vital members of the church planting and church strengthening team. A differing of giftedness does not lessen the missionary's value (1 Cor. 12:14–26). The different giftedness and roles are to work together to accomplish the single purpose of glorifying God in the church.

Just as the work of the church planting missionary is to train up men in that country to lead the church, so the work of the supporting missionary is to train up individuals to fill the supporting roles they are performing. This will require the supporting missionary not only to accomplish his tasks excellently, but also to seek out others who can be trained to do his ministry when he leaves the mission field. In this way, the local church or training center can work towards autonomy.

Steps to Church Planting

With the goal of planting indigenous churches, it is important to consider the steps in the church planting process. This list is certainly not exhaustive, but it represents some of the major areas that must be considered in church planting through AGC.

Essential characteristics of a church planter

The Apostle Paul serves as an excellent example of a man used by God to plant churches. His love for Christ was evidenced by his love for the body of Christ, the church. It is for Christ and His church that Paul gave his entire life so that every man may be complete in Christ (Col. 1:24–29). Characteristics that were evident in the Apostle Paul’s life must be true of church planters today. These qualities are described in AGC’s Missionary Handbook.

Create a church planting team

The example we find in Scripture is that men went out as teams to plant churches. The Apostle Paul planted churches with companions, including men such as Barnabas, John Mark, Timothy, Luke, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychichus, Trophimus, et al. (Acts 13:1–3; 20:4).

The church at Jerusalem was being led by at least James and Peter, and other “elders and apostles” (Acts 15:4, 7, 13). Paul had multiple elders appointed in each church he planted (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The plurality of elders is God’s plan for His church (Titus 1:5). Jesus assembled a team of disciples to impact the world. Jesus spoke the Great Commission to eleven men (Matt. 28:16).

Therefore, church planting should be accomplished by teams rather than an individual. This approach provides mutual accountability, encouragement, and synergy of giftedness. A team may include a missionary family or preferably, spiritually mature local believers. The roles of each person on the church planting team should be clearly defined so that each person can be using their spiritual gifts to serve the body of Christ.

As stated earlier, the goal is to plant indigenous churches that are not reliant upon foreign support. National partners who are returning to their home countries are excellent candidates to fill the role of pastor during the church plant and also for the long-term. American missionaries, on the other hand, should strive to place local men in positions of leadership as soon as is biblically wise in accordance with Paul’s actions in Acts 14:23 and his encouragement for Titus in Titus 1:5. Ideally, a local man will be installed as the pastor from the very beginning of the church plant.

Determine theological convictions

The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). The leaders of the church must “be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). Therefore, there must be clarity on the theological convictions of the church.

For church plants through AGC, a church’s theological convictions must not conflict with AGC’s doctrinal statement and constitution. For many churches, it is helpful to create similar documents that ensure the elders of the new church plant are all in agreement on doctrinal principles that the church will teach and that individuals must agree with prior to becoming members of the church.

Recognize church members

The church is comprised of those who have been redeemed by Christ, have placed their faith in the finished work of Christ, and have begun demonstrating the fruits of repentance (Matt. 3:8; Eph. 2:8–10; 1 Pet. 3:18). There is a fellowship that exists among those in the church that is unique to those who have come to know Christ rather than based on any previous religious, clan, political, or even family relationships (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:9–14; 1 Jn. 1:6–7). Those outside the church will recognize the difference between themselves and those in the church. Those churches existing in hostile situations will recognize that suffering is to be expected for those that follow Jesus Christ who was rejected and crucified by men (Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 1:8; 1 Pet. 2:21–25).

Encourage church life

There are several ways to encourage the church to function as a true church, including:

- **Sunday Worship:** Corporate worship is an essential element in the life of the church. The goal of the entire service must be the exaltation of Christ and salvation in His name alone (Heb. 10:24–25; 13:15).
- **Discipleship:** There must be a focus on the development of leaders in the church through discipleship. Discipleship must be encouraged among all the members of the church (Rom. 15:14; 1 Pet. 5:3).
- **Prayer:** There must be a commitment to depend on God's grace and mercy in personal, family, and corporate prayer in order that in all our blessings the Giver will get the glory (Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2).
- **Instruction:** Stimulate personal efforts to grow and help each other grow in biblical truth and wisdom and faith and love, which show Christ as our supreme treasure (Acts 18:11; 1 Tim. 4:13).
- **Fellowship:** The church must pursue a life together in sacrificial faith-sustaining care for each other in loving relationships at every level of youth and age, joy and sorrow, comfort and crisis, health and brokenness (Heb. 3:13).
- **Accountability:** Church members must hold each other accountable to the standards of Scripture (Rom. 15:14; 1 Thess. 5:14).
- **Witness and missions:** Evangelism through the faithful proclamation of the gospel must be encouraged as a regular element in the lives of each member of the church (Rom. 10:14–17; 2 Cor. 5:17–20). Each church must be active in the supporting the growth of the church both locally and internationally so that all nations may come to worship Christ (Matt. 28:18–20).
- **Harmony and compassion:** Intentional efforts to display love across cultural lines and to be a church that models the fruit of that love. Members must be encouraged to demonstrate compassion to those in need in order to show the love of God (Col. 3:12; 1 Jn. 3:10–11).
- **Submission:** Members must be in humble submission to biblically qualified elders who lead by example, not dominion, in order to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Submission should be with joy, not under compulsion (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5).

- Legacy: The church must be committed to teaching parents to train up succeeding generations of children and youth who love the Lord. The church can create programs that will assist the parents in this endeavor (Eph. 6:4).

Develop financial plan

A healthy church supports the ministries of the church, including the financial needs of the leadership. Although financial independence may not be possible in the first few years of church planting, it must be the goal that is being worked towards. A plan should be established that sets milestones for moving the church to being self-supported. From the start, the local church must prioritize the support of those who feed their souls. This contrasts with the model where the local pastor is completely supported as a missionary of others and the local church covers operating expenses. In this way, the church has a sense of ownership of its own shepherd; he is not a man paid from the outside (1 Tim. 5:17–18).

Summary and Modification Policy

The principles concerning the biblical theology of missions and church-planting ministry expressed in this document shall serve as the primary governing document implemented by the AGC Missions Committee in the missionary selection/review process and shall provide a guide for the AGC Elder Board to use as they exercise oversight and make decisions on missions matters. Since AGC is dedicated to upholding Scripture as the chief authority in all matters of faith and doctrine, this document may be modified by Elder Board approval if it is found to be errant or lacking in any area.

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