

SBC Shepherd Statement: Philosophy of Missions

*Let the nations be glad and sing for joy...
Let the peoples praise you O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
—Psalm 67:4a, 5*

The God of the Bible is a missionary God. He has a mission: to be praised by all peoples among all nations. This is his due, and it is for the gladness and joy of the people. All people were created by him and for him and know our fullest purpose when enjoying our Creator in praise: the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

To this end, our missionary God chose a people to be his before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and in the fullness of time sent his Son to be the propitiation for their sins (Gal. 4:4, 1 John 4:10). Jesus' death on the cross as a substitute has secured the salvation of all those who, called by God, would repent of sins and trust in him. God then dwells with them by the Spirit, to make a new nation of people for his possession (1 Peter 2:9). This people includes those from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev. 5:9), in every generation (Ps. 78:4).

Because this is the mission of our God, it is also the mission of the church. He now sends us (John 17:18), giving us the mandate to go, make disciples of all nations—God himself making his appeal through us (Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor. 5:20).

With that in mind, the elders of Stafford Baptist Church adopt the following statement regarding our philosophy of missions—how we intend to work together toward the mission of God among the nations.

1. Definition of Missions

Though our entire lives are to be offered to God for his service (Rom. 12:1), and all Christians are called to share the good news of the gospel, “missions” is the intentional crossing of ethnic, linguistic, and geographic boundaries to gather new churches in obedience to the Great Commission.¹

2. Our Obligation in the Mission

Though not every Christian will be a missionary, all churches are commanded to obey the Great Commission, and every member of Christ's body has a part to play; in prayer, in financial support, in encouragement, or for some, to go. Missionaries go with the confirmation and support of the local church of which they are a member. The calling to missions must be discerned with the local body under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3). Those who stay have a responsibility to continue to care for and support missionaries in whatever ways are most helpful (3 John 4-8).

3. Our Partners in the Mission

¹ Andy Johnson, “Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global,” pg. 35. Much of this philosophy is indebted to Andy's work.

Because the work of missions involves partnership between the church and those who go, we must think well about *who* we will partner with and *how* we will partner with them. First, Stafford Baptist will make the following commitments as we discern *who* to partner with:

1. *Theologically like-minded*: Whether sending out a missionary from our own body, or supporting one from another, we will look for partners who share the same theological distinctives as our own body. They should be able to affirm all twenty-two paragraphs of the Stafford Baptist Church Statement of Faith. This means we will be partnering with missionaries who are Baptist, reformed, and complementarian. They must also agree with the philosophy of missions expressed in this document.
2. *Local church-centered*: Though many of Christ's people do tremendous good work in his name, we particularly want to focus on those partners who are working to build up the local church. We believe that the local church is the center of God's plan to reach the nations and bring glory to himself (Eph. 3:10). Though our partners need not be pastors of churches, they must aim in their work to edify the church.
3. *Contextually strategic*: Paul's own ambition was to "preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named." (Rom. 15:20). While there is tremendous and ongoing need in existing churches, we particularly want to focus on contexts where the work is difficult and among the unreached. Further, it means investing in places where, according to our own discernment, investments will make the greatest spiritual returns.
4. *Relationally connected*: Our aim is to have partnerships marked by rich and deep relationships between not only the missionary and our elders, but the missionary and our entire church. We want to partner with people we know and have opportunity to see and interact with regularly.
5. *Long-term*: We intend for our mission partnerships to continue for as long as there is a need. Obviously, our own ability to partner may change due to financial constraints or other partnership opportunities, but we understand that strong growth takes years, and so must our support.
6. *Faithfulness focused*: Finally, we aim to assess our partnerships and their effectiveness based on the standard of faithfulness rather than fruitfulness. We are responsible to be faithful; God is responsible for the fruit. We do not think our investment in missions can be measured simply by the number of baptisms or new churches started. Because only God can bring forth fruit, we will pray earnestly for God to bless our efforts.

Practically, this means that SBC may have relatively *fewer* but Lord willing *deeper* and *longer* missions partnerships, by and large. We are happy to receive recommendations for missions partners from any member, to be assessed on the above criteria, but this kind of philosophy means that we will have fewer opportunities to add new missions partners. We are pursuing a ministry focus that eschews excitement and rewards patience.

SBC may determine it is best to end a partnership if the partner no longer meets the previous criteria. In that case, we would aim to give the partner ample warning of the end of the support and continue our support until the end of the budget year.

4. Our Partnership in the Mission

With the above criteria of *who* we will partner with, it is also important to consider *how* we will partner:

1. *Financial*: Our most basic partnership is a financial partnership. Our aim, as a church, is to give at least ten-percent of our annual budget for the cause of missions. We intend to support missionaries with substantial gifts, rather than giving smaller gifts to more partners.
2. *Prayer*: We pledge as a church to remember our missions partners regularly in prayer, and to inquire regularly how we can pray for our missions partners. Our hope is to regularly give updates to the membership of the church at our members' meetings, so that our church hears from each of our partners at least annually. When possible, we would like those partners to share the update themselves, whether by live or prerecorded video.
3. *Visits*: We aim to visit our supported workers *at least* every three years. This means we must budget for the expenses associated with these trips. Where this is not possible due to local restrictions, we will make other plans to visit (when the missionary is stateside, or meeting in a neutral location). If these regular visits are not possible, it is reason for us to reconsider the sustainability of our partnership. The goal of these trips is to encourage the missionary and check in on their work.
4. *Service*: In addition to the service of monetary gifts, prayer, and visits, we aim to partner with our supported workers through other acts of service, that may include offering childcare for a ministry retreat, hosting a VBS, or some particular training. Any short-term trips that our church takes will be aimed at what is most helpful to the partner and their work, not what is most rewarding or exciting for us.
5. *People*: We will pray for, equip, and invite members of our church to cross barriers of language and culture to bring the gospel to the nations alongside our missions partners. We aim to send our best-elder or deacon quality leaders and servants who are faithful in the service of the church and in the task of disciple-making.

We propose that these commitments reflect the priorities and wisdom of God's Word. However, we are keenly aware that our efforts are in vain without God's blessing. We pray that God would use our feeble efforts to do abundantly more than we can ask or think, according to the same power that is at work within us; to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).