
HOW TO START A MISSIONS SENDING STRUCTURE (DEPARTMENT) IN A NEW SENDING NATION

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Explanation

Pastor and leader Arto Hamalainen has prepared excellent material on starting a missions dept. His material is extensive and detailed. This is meant to be a brief overview, not a duplication of his excellent material which has many details. We do include a flow chart from our Argentine missions dept which gives a idea of a end result to shoot for. The flow chart comes after over 20 years of work and effort, and having the luxury of having veteran missionaries available to come back and be on staff with us.

Introduction

We believe that God has called and still calls many people to Latin America. One of the key factors in the missionary call is that the local church has to accompany that calling. Another important factor is that sending institutions and structures are healthy and solid. Organization is important, as is having a clear vision. A vision without a good structure and organization results in empty words without fulfillment. That is why it is important to have a good organization and sending structures.

1 KEYS TO A GOOD ORGANIZATION

1.1. People

An important factor is the challenge of having key people and the right people. If we do not have reliable, committed people we can't implement the plans we have. In many of our countries, there are many excellent local leaders, but few national leaders; people willing to lend of their leadership, outside the context of their local church. So it's hard to find good leaders and persons willing to give of their time and who have the time to give.

The other side of the coin: to create "positions" in the organization is a temptation, and we rush to fill those "positions" with people who don't carry out with the tasks, and ultimately this causes more obstacles than benefits to the organization. To create positions, just for creating them, doesn't help in a long term.

We have to multiply our efforts involving as many people, because the task is large and great. But we need the right people.

1.2. Transparency

It is tremendously important to have transparency in all the details of finances, and especially when handling money. Strict controls must be put into place, and do not entrust this important area to only one single person. (That can lead to temptation to have abuse, mismanagement, etc.)

In many countries in which we live, there exists in the secular realm a "culture of corruption." Therefore it is important to create a culture of trust and honesty. In the past the enemy has used this area to slow the progress of missions in many countries. We must be very careful because the enemy wants to stop the vision through lack of confidence and order.

1.3 Depend on the Holy Spirit

Raising the missionary vision is a miracle and a spiritual work. We must depend on the Holy Spirit. We must do our best but can't depend on human wisdom, ability, or efforts.

2 ELEMENTS OF THE ORGANIZATION OF A MISSIONS DEPARTMENT

2.1. The President's duties

1. In the beginning, a great amount of his work will be to promote missions and sow the missionary vision (as the structure grows, less time will be spent on this and more on office and organization).
2. Supervise the work of employees in the office.
3. Supervise and communicate with the board/committee, whatever it would be called.
4. Supervise and pastor the missionaries (focusing in the pastoral work) Encourage them.

Note: *It is important, if possible, to have people who can work full-time, because the challenge is great and it does not grow easily without the total commitment of one or more people who are full time.*

2.2. The work of the office

1. To receive offerings and make receipts, send the monthly support to the missionary
2. Prepare reports for the missionaries, so they know where the offerings come from
3. Have reports for churches to let them to know how much they have given in a year.
4. Prepare promotional and informational materials, and communicate with the churches.
5. Prepare a monthly newsletter for the missionaries, which includes a monthly letter from the president, the status of their accounts and financial reports, and Christian materials in Spanish, for adults and children.
6. Prepare special mailings for children sporadically.

There is much other work that can be described, these are just a few points to mention.

2.3. The management of the offerings

- The churches send their offerings through bank deposits, checks or cash and those offerings are credited to a sub account of the missionary, and sent to them each month.
- The office, through a database, credits the offering to the account of the missionary. This offering should be sent once each month on a set day.
- Anywhere from 5-10% is usually taken out of the offerings for administration, secretaries, and telephones, expenses, etc.
- It is recommended to have some sort of emergency fund as well, or for return tickets. It is recommended to take out 5% of the offerings for that purpose, that are held in a savings account for the return ticket of the family. This percentage is put in their particular accounts, it is not put in common fund, so the missionary knows how much he/she has for a future return.
- Through the monthly reports, the missionary knows where the offerings come from. If the missionary has a "cushion", he/she receives a fixed amount of money each month. Otherwise, they receive what they have in their accounts monthly.
- In extreme cases, the Missions Department can loan money to the missionary.

2.4. How to organize an Executive Board

- We must evaluate the needed positions, such as Secretary, Treasurer, etc. We also have to evaluate each country and their need of promoters / coordinators.
- There is a need for an Executive Board and administrative team. In Argentina's case the executive board meets every two months and the administrative team every 1-2 weeks.
- The Board/committee evolves over time, growth, and the current needs the nation is facing. One thing is clear: we must not work alone; we need the Board's covering and to work in a team.

2.5. Assessment of potential missionary candidates

- Candidates are evaluated by the president and/or administrative team to determine whether the time for their approval is right. They must have their pastor's approval. They also must be involved in planting the missionary vision in their churches and districts, so they have authority at the time of collecting funds. Sometimes it is necessary to tell a potential candidate to wait several years. It is necessary to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.
- Candidates are involved in an exam process that can take several months and involve their local pastor, their area presbyter, the district superintendent (interviews and letters of recommendation), the regional committee and finally the Missions Department. The final approval is given by the national executive presbytery, based on the recommendation of the missions department.
- After the approval, a candidate is simply that: a CANDIDATE. The final approval comes from the church and the Holy Spirit. If God calls, He provides. The approved candidates have before them the challenge of raising their support, which involves visiting many churches to have a good base for their time of

service. Candidates must have 50% of the commitments signed, and the rest can be verbal commitments.

- They must assist the School of Missions for new candidates, as well as Missionary Renewal where veterans who are on deputation are also in attendance.
- Each service period is for 3 years (in the past, it was for 2 years), and a leave time, from 6 to 8 months. It can be extended to 4 years and 1 year.
- Currently, we have a program called Potential Missionary Group (PMG) to help prepare and guide and filter the future missionaries.

2.6. Missionary categories

An important part of the structure is to have different categories for the missionaries, which allows flexibility, but still has requirements for approval.

As an example, here are some of the possible categories:

- **Regular/Full Missionary:** Those with a minimum of 2 years of experience.
- **Training Missionary:** Allows young people to gain experience in the mission field.
- **Short Term Missionary:** One year or less, for lays or for the ones who need to confirm the call.
- **Missionary Pastor or Lay:** For pastors who are supported by churches in other nations, or bi-vocational missionaries, not financially dependent on their sending nation or church, but want to maintain a spiritual link.

2.7. Ways to promote missionary vision and work.

- Annual posters with pictures.
- Annual reports.
- Missions Night in the Annual National Conference.
- Taking missions nights in the district commissions.
- National Missionary Tour.
- Organization of missions departments in each church and having a fluid contact with them.
- Publish reading material for children.
- Monthly thank-you letters, which accompany the receipts, also reporting the recent news.
- Videos.

2.8. Location of the missionaries.

- It is important to give primary consideration to the place to which our missionaries have been called. Most of the time, we respect the call of where they want to go, and only in special situations try to re-direct that call to a different place.
- It is always best to try to work along with the national churches of the Assemblies of God; never independently of the national church.
- When there is no national church, it is important to try to work with the team of missionaries from the Assemblies of God in that country. The Assemblies of God have a purpose, and it works. Why then trying to reinvent the wheel? Many new senders lack experience and can learn from those who have it.

3 THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF A DEPARTMENT BRING DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

3.1. "Beginning"

3.1.1 The work of the President.

In a first stage, the president spends more time in promoting and travelling; as the department grows, he spends more time supervising the office, visiting and supervising the missionaries, etc.

3.1.2. We must work not only with the future, but also with the present.

We must work with local churches, not just with the future church through the Bible school. The Bible School programs are very important, but a missions department is even more important. If we don't reach the present, the "future" becomes discouraged as they must be working under the "present" leaders for many years. It is important to plant seeds in the future through the Bible schools, but it is as equally important to work through the department of missions to reach the local churches.

3.1.3. Go church by church, starting with those that are open.

You must go to every local church that allows you to help them take their first steps. Personal contact and working with local churches were keys for the growth.

3.1.4. It is a challenge to plant the vision without missionary candidates to support in the early stages.

You could organized short-term projects, to motivate, domestic "missionary" projects among other culture groups, in the beginning, when you still don't have projects for people to focus on and give to.

3.2. Consolidating

We learn from experiences what works and what does not, and we adapt the structure, according to those lessons and experiences. We have to form an increasingly strong commission, involving more people in the task.

Though mistakes will be made, lessons are learned from them.

There are different stages of growth and consolidation. Sometimes we stop growing for a while to consolidate and prepare for the next stage of growth. (Argentina during the 2002 crisis stopped accepting new candidates for a time and pushed to start the "future potential missionary group" to better prepare the future candidates.

3.3. Growth

3.3.1. Problems, to an extent, are needed.

We understand that there will always be problems, because we are working with people, we are pioneering something that is new, we have limited experience. Often as well the churches are immature, and as well the devil is angry and wants to stop the work. But problems also help us grow, mature, and prepare for future growth.

So ... do not be discouraged with the tests ... not even with the biggest ones. We learn from everything.

3.3.2. Multiplying by involving more people.

We must also involve more and more people, and seeking to expand the structure for further growth. However we must always involve the “right people,” not adding people just to add them.

3.3.3. Take advantage of our career and experience to sow the missionary vision.

There are churches and pastors who will be more open after seeing results and fruits. We must take advantage and celebrate the results to advance the vision and the Kingdom.

3.3.4. Keep our hearts from pride, jealousy and indifference.

There will always be people who are not open to the vision. We cannot take it personally, because it is not. They are not rejecting us. We could feel PAIN with the indifference of other pastors and perhaps leaders, but not anger.

Also, with the growth, some people will be jealous. We have to keep our hearts from bitterness, anger, and attitudes that are not correct.

We can also feel pride for the results. Do not forget that the Holy Spirit called young people. We were important in helping to accommodate everything, but we are vessels used by Him ... The vision came for Him and His mercy, is not something of our merit. He called our young people, even in the midst of an "anti-missionary vision" culture. He has used us. We must not fall to the temptation of pride.

4 GENERAL PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER WHEN PREPARING AND FORMING STRUCTURES

4.1. Principal ONE:

The structure needs to be flexible enough so that it enables those who are called can find a way to be sent, and won't need to resort to other structures that don't belong to the Assemblies of God, simply because of rigid structures that don't accommodate them.

It is important to create a structure that allows flexibility, without sacrificing the standards of excellence. It will of course also change and be adjusted as it grows and learns from experience, and changes in different stages and from growth.

4.2. Principal TWO:

To create a network composed of pastors and laymen who promote the vision.

It is great to have pastors in the network, but we must also involve lay people that have a vision put there by God. The Holy Spirit is moving pastors and laymen to have a burden in promoting and seeding the vision church by church, within their district or area. In many countries, God has raised an invisible army among the laity and we must recognize and encourage this. Sometimes it's scary, because the vision has emerged from the "people" and not from the "pastors / leaders."

4.3. Principal THREE:

Missionaries visiting churches to raise their support (Deputation) may be difficult in the beginning, but it helps to accelerate the growth of missions vision and create a “personalization” of missions between churches and missionaries they can, do, and will support.

Many people said this system would never work in Argentina, and others accused us of wanting to “import” a US system. But it did, and the personal contact between the missionary and the local church was a key factor in the consistent growth, as the church caught the vision through missionary visits. It also was an influent factor in people’s desire of giving the offerings to a particular missionary, instead of giving them to a common fund in an office.

4.4. Principal FOUR:

Take advantage of important opportunities to sow the vision. Make a good use of the national events and conferences put on by the general council/national church.

It is important to attend to every important event to present missions. We are a NETWORK and we must seize the network of the Assemblies of God to spread the vision. For example: the annual national conferences. Many pastors attend to these conferences ...not to hear about missions but because it is their pastors conference. Yet in having a “night or day” of missions, they can also be influenced and touched by the Holy Spirit.

4.5. Principal FIVE:

Be transparent and have good organization in your accounting.

It is important to present annual reports on giving for all the pastors, and to submit detailed expense reports to the national executive council, to therefore be accountable to them. This transparency leads to a greater trust and to an increase in offerings.

4.6. Principal SIX:

Get as many involved as you can: Working with other departments.

It is important to work with other departments such as the Women Department, youth, children, to challenge them to support the missionary vision. They can often help with specific challenges and needs. (Example, help raise funds for an airline ticket for a missionary to go to the field)

4.7. Principal SEVEN:

Sowing a complete vision.

We don’t want to talk only about GOING. We also have to talk about Sending/Giving. But we shouldn’t speak only of GIVING. We also must speak of the call to GO. And prayer is a very important key. Make a balanced seeding and don’t focus on just a part of the missionary work.

4.8. Principal EIGHT:

Have a challenge that is clear and with achievable goals.

For example: If every brother gave \$ 1 per month, we would have such over a million dollars for missions. It is a challenge, and bigger than they can imagine, but also a reachable goal. People have to recognize that it’s something achievable, which helps to break the mentality of the “we can’t do it.”

CONCLUSION

There's so much to do! Even in Argentina, with over 20 years of experience and the leader in Latin America, we still need to do a lot! How much more in a country that is just starting! May God give us wisdom to organize, and prepare ourselves and prepare the structure for a future growth.

APPENDIX

Flow Chart of Argentine Missions Department

GENERAL ORGANIZATION





