


## Measure Church Missions Potential Flagging 10 Expansion Indicators by Ellen Livingood

*I am often asked for a “thermometer” to measure the missions temperature of local congregations. Both churches and agencies want to have a better means of discerning what marks congregations ready to increase their global impact.*


*Over time, I have developed several matrices based on outcome goals. What is presented here is a more general measurement tool that provides a starting point. In this issue, we will look at 10 gauges of a church’s potential for a major expansion of missions involvement. In next month’s Postings, we will look at 10 measurements of an agency’s ability to partner more significantly with churches.*

Many church assessment tools focus primarily on current activities. However, I believe that questions revolving around leadership are better indicators of future potential. The following “top 10” are presented from the church perspective but can also be measured by an outside mobilizer.


- 1. Are there several leaders in our church motivated by a “holy dissatisfaction” with our current global impact and passionate to see God use our congregation to accomplish far more to expand God’s Kingdom?**

 This question trumps all of the rest. If there are men and women of influence in your church who are passionate about finding better ways to reach across cultural barriers to see God use your congregation to transform the lives of the unreached and the needy, your church is a candidate for greater global engagement.


- 2. What is the make-up of our congregation?**


 If your congregation is comprised primarily of people 50 and older, your church is probably dying, as are churches focused around a dwindling ethnic minority


in their community. Some of these churches can and will be reborn, but the process is so energy-absorbing that missions is usually postponed. Yet struggling churches often plead for help, and missions mobilizers with pastoral gifts are tempted to try to rescue them. Beware—this type of church absorbs large amounts of time and resources with little missions pay-back.

 Regardless of size, if your church has a good spread of ages and reflects the ethnic diversity of your community, you are good partnership candidates.


- 3. What would most people in our church name as the most exciting thing that has happened in, or been done by, our church in the last year?**

  
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by a “holy dissatisfaction”  
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accomplish far more...?**

 Unanimity is not important, but if it is difficult to identify anything that has energized your congregation, leadership inertia may make it hard to effect change.

 If the majority of people in your church would name an internally focused program, your church functions on an attractional model (centered on drawing people to the church) rather than a missional one

(centered on going out to minister to people where they are).

 If a good number of people name an externally focused ministry, your congregation is poised for global impact.

- 4. What is our senior pastor’s attitude toward global engagement?** (Personal interaction with pastors is usually the only way to get a clear picture of their missions perspective because missions teams can “read” pastors as antagonistic to missions when in reality, their negative responses reflect frustration with the current practice of missions, not the value of missions as a church priority.)



If your pastor's missions interest registers no higher than "tolerant," some mobilizers would read this as a red flag for deeper missions engagement. I disagree.

If God has put missions passion in the hearts of other leaders in your church, then I believe He wants to mobilize your congregation for expanded global impact, and He may be ready to change the pastor's heart in the process.



A growing number of pastors, particularly younger ones, are catching a new vision for global engagement, although it may be radically different from the more traditional approaches of the past.

If your pastor(s) are willing to invest some of their own time to speak into the development of a global strategy for the church, the flag is green.

##### 5. Who leads missions in our church?



If your pastor leads missions, does that indicate that the church culture revolves around the pastor doing everything? This is not a healthy environment for missions expansion.



If your pastor leads missions because he is committed to a major paradigm transition, that is a green flag.



If a rather isolated group of enthusiasts leads missions with the goal of recruiting others to join their special circle, the red flag flies.



If your missions team represents various ages and different interest groups within the church with leadership unafraid to ask tough questions and implement change, you have a healthy environment.



If no one leads missions in your church, the determining factors revert to questions that measure desire for change.

##### 6. What are our church's current, focus-absorbing priorities?



If your church is heavily engaged in something else—like a building program, changing pastoral leadership, making major shifts in church paradigms, struggling to remain financially solvent—expanding your role in missions will be difficult at this point in time, i.e. there is a lack of bandwidth for the process to get significant attention from key leaders.



If your church is expanding its awareness of local needs and growing in its willingness to reach across economic and ethnic differences to share Christ's love in your community, your congregation is ready to expand those ministries into a global context, although finding sufficient leaders for growing local and global programs may be a challenge.

##### 7. Can you identify people who are currently considering future missions service?



If over the past five years your church has not sent a new worker on a one-year-plus field assignment, you are waving a yellow flag. Exceptions would be new churches or those which have a strategy of exclusively supporting nationals or projects.



If your church debriefs returning short-term teams with the "What is God's next step for you in global-missions involvement," and you provide a variety of opportunities to deepen their missions passion and expand their ministry experience, you likely have multiple people in the missions pipeline. Another green flag is a stream of people taking the "Perspectives" course.

##### 8. Are those in our missions leadership willing to let go of traditional missions programs and priorities, and allow younger generations to develop "new wineskins" of highly relational, hands-on approaches to global engagement?



**Is your missions team investigating new opportunities to engage the peoples of the world who live in your own community?**



If your missions committee's primary goal is to find younger people to "teach how to do it," i.e. run your longstanding programs, before you

hand over leadership, expansion will be difficult.



Is your missions team investigating new opportunities to engage the peoples of the world who live in your own community? For instance, are you interacting with those who lead your congregation's local outreach ministries to discover ways you can build more bridges to nearby immigrant families? Green flag!

##### 9. Do we have some current and potential leaders who will invest time to seek God's direction for a faith-stretching missions strategy?



Does your church have a core of at least six to eight people, including one or more pastors, and two or more elders/deacons, who are willing to commit significant time to meet, pray, and shape a strategy for expand-

ing your church's global engagement? At least one-third of these should be under the age of 40.

**10. Can our church sustain a continuity of missions leadership over at least the next three to five years?**



Do key leadership roles in your church's missions program intentionally or proverbially seem to continually rotate to different people? **Caution:** Because of both a relatively steep learning curve and the necessity of building trust relationships over time, a constant turnover in leadership is counterproductive to expanding global partnering.



While relocations and changes in person circumstances will always create a certain amount of leadership attrition, is your church committed to working hard to build a stable team of leaders who will invest the needed time over the long term to establish in-depth rela-

tionships, maintain corporate memory, and fulfill partnership promises?

  
**Our church is committed to building a stable team of leaders to establish in-depth relationships... and fulfill partnership promises.**

**No analogy is perfect, and in this case, red flags do not mean that a church is out of the race.** However, I believe that red flags do mean that without significant change, these churches will be relegated to the sidelines of global impact.

While these questions can be used as an evaluation tool, they are better employed as a means of identifying key areas of needed growth.

Churches, will you take the challenge of building more green-flag characteristics into your global missions program? Agencies, will you identify more green-flag churches and challenge them to live up to their potential?

*Ellen Livingood launched Catalyst Services in 2005 to further church/agency collaboration. She is available to help your church or agency work through these questions and/or develop a customized matrix to evaluate church readiness.*



### Interchange Postings

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