

Statement on the Purpose of the Church in Missions
Ridgeview Bible Church

Statement: *We believe that God designed the local church to be the instrument and goal of missions.*

Introduction

The following is an exposition of Ridgeview Bible Church’s Statement on Global Missions.

Missions

When we speak of missions, we are referring to the intentional effort to fulfill Christ’s commission (Matt 28:18–20) by sending suitable Christ-followers to places beyond the physical reach of the local church to proclaim the Gospel, to bring sinners to repentance and faith, and to establish New Testament churches.¹

By this, we distinguish missions from evangelism and even the planting of local churches in places with access to the Gospel.

The Church

The Scriptures refer to the organized, committed, and united gathering of Christ-followers as the church. The church is organized with leadership and direction in such a way that it functions as one body (1 Cor 12:12–20, Titus 1:5 (see also 1 Tim 3:1–13)). The church recognizes itself as a singular community (Matt 18:15–20, 1 Pet 5:2). The church is united to do the work of ministry (Eph 4:12).

The Church as Instrument of Missions

The Scriptures teach that the local church should be at the heart of the missions movement. One might argue that simply an individual believer is the instrument God uses in missions. However, this is only partially true. Though in the very early stages of Christ’s commission, it seems that missions are merely the result of one believer’s obedience to Christ (Acts 8:5), with the establishment of local churches, it is the churches that lead as sending agents.

One key example is Paul and Barnabas’s submission to the Spirit’s leading through the church at Antioch to send them out to minister (Acts 13:1–3). Yes, even the great Apostle relied upon the church as the instrument to send him.

Another key evidence is in the Apostle Paul’s explanation to the Ephesians concerning the purpose of the church. In 3:7–12, we read that “...through the church the manifold wisdom of God” may be proclaimed “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). Regardless of the debate as to whom these rulers and authorities are, Paul clearly indicates that the church is the instrument through which God’s wisdom is declared. Thus local churches should see their existence as central to declaring the wisdom of God, locally and globally as the Lord provides.

¹ Robin Hadaway, *A Survey of World Missions* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 2.

The Church as the Goal of Missions

The Scriptures teach that the local church is God's goal² in missions. Jesus promised that the unstoppable, earthly force He will build on earth is His church (Matt 16:18). As a result, the first Christians are quickly described as the church (Acts 5:11), and even as churches defined by their location (Acts 8:1). There is evidence that this goal is not merely a global community known as the Church but local churches themselves. The establishment of churches is early attested by Paul (Acts 14:23), not to mention the fact that each of his epistles (save Philemon) address churches or church leaders for their benefit. Indeed, in each epistle, the Apostle Paul sees these gathered believers as having achieved their final earthly goal prior to the return of Christ (i.e. there was not another earthly step in the Christian life beyond uniting in the church) (Rom 8:23, 1 Cor 1:7, Gal 5:5, Phil 3:20, 1 Thess 1:10, Titus 2:13).

On the other hand, to be apart from the church is to be in an unstable place as a Christian. To be without the church is to lack the needed exhortation to guard against sin's deception (Heb 3:13). To be alone as a Christian is to lack the other needed giftings that fellow Christians can share (1 Cor 12:21–26). To be churchless is to be shepherdless, without oversight (1 Peter 5:2), without relational teaching (Titus 1:9). Without the church, one cannot be held accountable (Matt 15:18–20, 1 Cor 5:1–5). Indeed, a Christian without a church cannot reasonably receive the ordinances³ (which imply community).

Thus, according to Scripture, we are convinced that the local church should be the goal of missions.

² By goal, we mean that the visible, spiritual evidence of missions will be the establishment of local churches. In this, we do not deny that the chief end of all things is the glory of God (Rom 11:33). Rather, the local church is that which will give God the glory in missions.

³ Ordinances (also referred to in the church as "sacraments") include baptism and the Lord's Supper.