

Fruitful practices in formulating local church mission strategies

Africa Inland Mission is pleased to bring you the results of a consultation with local churches from across Great Britain. AIM is passionate about local churches faithfully following the Lord Jesus as he leads us all into the great commission. Having a good plan to send cross-cultural workers – having a well thought through strategy – is a really good place to start. In this *fruitful practice* document, you can read the wisdom of churches that have already been fruitful in sending workers and caring for them through long-term involvement in mission.

We would like to highlight two general points to start. Firstly, it is important to recognise that in terms of developing the mission focus of the local church, there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy. Local churches face widely different challenges and contexts. With that in mind these guidelines are offered to each church to consider in the light of their own unique situations.

Secondly, nurturing an expanding understanding of mission, and putting in place intentional ways to embrace this, is a process that takes time. We hope that as you consider each point of wisdom gleaned from the conversations with our church friends and as you consider each key question you, as a local church, will move forward at a pace that fits your community and in a way that helps the members of your Church embrace the vision brought by your leadership.

Seven key *fruitful practice* areas to consider that the churches suggested

1. Clarify your understanding of mission

This fruitful practice idea is like digging the foundations of your building. It is crucial to identify your shared biblical understanding of mission. Should it be entirely focused on Matthew 28:19 – highlighting the proclamation of the gospel? What should the balance be when it comes to 'loving your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 22:37-39) and acts of service? Does your church value having a strategic focus such as unreached people groups? Once you start discussing these issues it can be quite surprising to see the breadth and strength of feeling that arises. It is vitally important to take the time to graciously talk through the different Biblical understandings. Work out a clear statement of your common understanding of mission.

Key questions - What is Mission? What is the role of the local church in making disciples of all nations?

2. Church leadership commitment

A common factor across the churches was a clear mandate from and involvement of the church leadership in the church strategy. Ideally one of the leaders should have a specific mission brief. Churches that have developed mission strategies usually started out with wanting to move from being reactive (an appeal or a request for support from a Church member called to mission) to being proactive (nurturing mission throughout the Church year and praying for new opportunities e.g., reaching people from other nations who live in the locality of the Church).

Key questions - Is the leadership committed to the process of developing mission? Is this commitment shown by the designation of a leader to be fully involved in the church strategy development process?

3. Review & assessment

Before any change is suggested it is important to ascertain where the Church is currently at, acknowledge what has gone before and where development might take place. Recognising where the Church has come from is an important step to developing a fresh approach to mission.

Key questions – Is mission an add-on or a core activity of the Church? Is mission integrated with the wider Church activities of Sunday services, small groups meetings, and the children's and youth work? What cross cultural workers are already part of the church working either locally or overseas? Are there any patterns in the church's mission involvement? What current involvement does the church (the leadership and wider community) already highly value?

4. Formulating a vision, strategy, and structure

In the first fruitful practice area, you together talked through and collectively agreed upon your general understanding of mission. Now you need to work through what that means in practice for your church. Craft a vision statement for your church's mission involvement. Next, expand this with strategic goals and consider implementing structures that will help your church grasp the vision. Communicating and clarifying the mission focus should be one of the key strategic goals of your plan!

Key questions – How does each strategic goal contribute to your vision statement? If asked, would Church members be able to articulate what the Church is doing in terms of mission?

5. Crafting a mission policy

An agreed upon policy helps bring direction and consistency to the mission focus in the Church. The mission policy gives detail to your vision statement and strategic goals – it's the 'how we do things in our church'. When requests come for support of individuals or when the Church looks at the broader support of mission work and partnerships this document provides the procedures to follow.

Key questions - Is there a denominational or church network standard policy statement that can be considered as the basis for crafting a document to fit the unique situation of the Church? Have you thought through the role of people going on mission whether for shorter or longer periods and how the Church would offer support?

6. Partnership

Mission thinking and development can be greatly enhanced when churches, agencies and indigenous movements work in partnership.

Key question – What parameters would be set in relation to partnering with others in mission? How do your partnerships fit with your overall strategic aims?

7. Bringing the Church on the mission journey

What will it look like to have mission more integrated to the overall life of the Church? It is important to 'grow' the church into mission; planting the seed as early as possible is important and a healthy way to bring the vision to the whole Church.

Key question – How can the leadership of the Church guide people into the part that they play in the mission of the Church?