



Philosophy of Missions

(Throughout this philosophy, commitments and resolutions are reflected in italic font.)

Sun Valley Church (SVC) was planted in 2003 as a result of the mission-minded vision of West Side Baptist Church to see the Gospel flourish in the Yakima Valley and beyond. The elders of West Side Church knew that multiplying biblical churches has been God's strategy of reaching the nations since the Church began at Pentecost (Acts 2). Having begun this way, mission-mindedness has been part of Sun Valley's "spiritual genetics" since her inception, as reflected in her mission statement:

Sun Valley Church's Mission

Sun Valley Church exists to glorify God by creating an authentic Christian community that is Gospel-centered, grace-driven, and mission-minded.

The purpose of this Philosophy of Missions is to serve as a statement of belief regarding biblical missions, a guide to focus SVC's involvement with particular missionaries and ministries, and an explanation of how the elders of SVC determine the focus of missions efforts and resources.

FOUNDATION: Theology and Practice

(For a full explanation of SVC's theology, see the Sun Valley Church Statement of Faith.)

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:18-20¹

(1) The Mission of the Church is the Great Commission

Mission and *missions* are vital words, though the words themselves are not found in Scripture. Because of this, SVC's Philosophy of Missions must begin by simply defining what these words mean. The Church's mission—the mission of the global Church, and thus of local churches—was plainly laid out by Jesus Christ before His ascension in what has been called the Great Commission (see Matt 28:18-20 above). Through the Gospel of Christ, proclaimed by His saints in all the earth, God continues to deliver His elect from the domain of darkness and transfer them to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col 1:12-14). Therefore, the mission of the Church and missions proper may be defined as follows:

¹ The other Great Commission passages are Mark 13:10, 14:9, 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21-23; and Acts 1:8.

The mission of the Church is to glorify God by making disciples of all the peoples of the world by baptizing and teaching them to live as worshiping, obedient Christ-followers.

Missions is the intentional, God-glorifying activity of the Church in going to all the peoples of the world to make disciples by baptizing and teaching them to live as worshiping, obedient Christ-followers.

(2) The Glory of the Triune God is the Goal

Biblical missions is fundamentally trinitarian: From eternity, God the Father chose to save a group of sinful people for His glory by sending His eternal Son to redeem them in the power of the Holy Spirit, Who applies the redemption of the Son to those whom the Father has chosen (Eph 1:3-6; Jn 3:6-8). Thus, God has revealed Himself from the earliest pages of Scripture to be the missional God Who seeks and saves the lost (Gen 3:15; Lk 19:10). When Jesus gave the Great Commission to His Apostles for the Church, He made it clear that wherever the Church goes with the Gospel, they go in the Name of the Trinity, apart from Whom there can be no salvation. The result of the salvation of sinner through Christ is the worship and glory of the triune God, as some from every people will be gathered around the Throne of God, exalting Him for Who He is and for what He has done (Eph 1:11-14; Rev 7:9-17).

The goal of the salvation of the elect through the triune God—and thus the goal of missions—is the exaltation of God’s glory (Eph 1:12-14; Isa 48:9-11); this goal must be explicit in every missionary effort from first to last.

(3) The Gospel is the Center of Missions, and Humanity’s Only Hope

Missions aims at *something*, not *everything*. Many efforts are made to relieve human suffering and do good for others, but not all of these things are missions. If missions has the glory of the Trinity as its goal, then the centerpiece of missions must be the Gospel: that the Holy One redeemed condemned sinners by sending His Son to take on a human nature, to live a perfect life, die a substitutionary, atoning death in place of sinners, rise from the dead, and be exalted to the Right Hand of the Father, one day to return and reign over all creation (1 Co 15:1-4; Matt 23:29-31; Ps 110). Eternal life and salvation come only through faith in Jesus’ Name (Acts 16:29-30), and thus the Gospel is the only hope for humanity’s rescue from sin and death.

In every missionary endeavor, the Gospel must be central—in guiding missions strategy, evaluating missionary success, and in the message that is brought to the nations.

(4) The Holy Spirit Makes Missions Happen, so Prayerful Dependence is Critical

At His ascension, Jesus told His disciples that they would be His witnesses *after* the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8). Jesus taught that it is the Holy Spirit Who gives the new birth (Jn 3:3-8; cf. Tit 3:4-7), and it is the same God Who begins and brings salvation to completion (Phil 1:4-6). Because the goal of missions is to see God glorified in the conversion, baptism, and discipleship of Christ-followers, it is clear that the true power behind all missionary efforts is God the Holy Spirit.

Because there can be no missions without the Holy Spirit, the Church must be in constant, dependent prayer, both in going as missionaries and in sending missionaries.

(5) Missions Needs Going and Sending

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded His people to go with the Gospel into all the world. Therefore, in a sense, every Christian is part of the “going” in the mission of the Church. At the same time, reserving the historic term *missionary* for those, like Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3), who are called, qualified, recognized, and set apart for the missionary task is prudent and helpful.

In order for missions to happen, there must be missionaries who go out from the local Church, and who are sent by the local Church, including material support as well as spiritual oversight and care.

(6) Missions Needs Proclamation

At a time when there is confusion regarding the necessity of speaking the Gospel in missions, it is vital to affirm what the Lord commanded when He gave the Great Commission: “Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).

Missions needs verbal Gospel proclamation, otherwise missions is not happening. Whether this be through formal preaching, individual evangelism, or small group Bible study, the speaking of the Gospel is inseparable from the missionary task, because speaking the Gospel is the missionary task.

(7) Missions Needs Discipleship

Jesus identified two specific means of carrying out the Church’s mission: preaching and the administration of the Sacraments (Matt 28:18-20). The mission involves more than mere conversion; it is focused on discipling those who are converted as a result of Gospel proclamation.

The same Word that the Holy Spirit used to give the new birth is the same Word that must continually be ministered for the nurture and growth of disciples, who are nourished also by baptism (and, by extension, the Lord’s Supper).

(8) Local Churches Beget Local Churches

Missions is from the Lord, through the local Church, and for the birthing of new local churches. This is the pattern of missionary work seen in the New Testament. Paul and Barnabas were leaders in the local Church at Antioch, recognized as missionaries set apart by the Holy Spirit, and sent under the authority and accountability to the elders of the Antiochan Church (Acts 13:1-3, 14:24-28). The result of their missionary labors in each place they went was the birth of a local church in those cities. This is not to say that the focus of Gospel ministry is to groups of people rather than individual believers. Rather, salvation comes to individuals who repent of sin and believe the Gospel, and the natural impulse of the new believers is to gather together in local churches, which—in the New Testament pattern—the missionaries who led them to the Lord help establish (e.g., Tit 1:5).

The work of global missions is the responsibility of the local Church, which is called to train up, send, support (materially and spiritually), and oversee missionaries, who are called by God to help new believers gather in new or existing local churches. In its broadest sense – and given the scope and diversity of the socio-political circumstances facing each people group – a local church consists of a group of believers gathered together around the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments. In gatherings of new believers in frontier missions contexts, the goal of church planting includes the establishment of biblically qualified elders as church leaders.

(9) Frontier Missions is Essential to the Goal

Jesus sends His Church on mission to disciple “all nations,” which sets the entire world’s population as the scope of the Church’s task. The words “all nations,” or more precisely translated “all the peoples,” have been understood by many theologians and missiologists to delineate what has been termed *people groups*. For the purpose of missions, a people group would include the largest group of people within which believers and churches can multiply without encountering significant linguistic and socio-cultural hurdles.

Because reaching all the world’s people groups is the task at hand, going to people groups that are unreached with the Gospel is essential, and should generally be a primary focus of the local Church, as it was for Paul (Rom 15:20-21).

(10) Jesus Christ is Lord of Every Nation, and Lord of the Missionary Church

Jesus based the Great Commission on His universal authority as Lord, and thus He is Lord of every nation, as well as Lord of the Church. However, most political nations do not recognize the lordship of Jesus Christ, and many have set up laws to prohibit missionary work. Where the Church is tasked by her Lord to make disciples of the people groups within such nations, the authority of Jesus takes precedent over sinful laws that prohibit the pursuit of the mission He has given to His people.

Obedience to Jesus in the Great Commission sometimes requires a willingness to disobey laws that prohibit the proclamation of the Gospel, even as missionaries and believers seek to honor the authorities under which they live in every way that does not conflict with Jesus’ commands.

(11) Gospel Proclamation and Loving Action are Essential, and Action Serves Proclamation

In an age when the proclamation of the Gospel is frequently confused with social action, clarity on the relationship of evangelism to acts of mercy is important. In the missionary work of the early Church, acts of mercy (love of neighbor) were regularly seen, and are commanded (Acts 11:29-30, 19:11-12; Gal 6:10). In the biblical schema, love of neighbor never replaces the speaking of the Gospel and the call of sinners to repentance, but rather serves to support and enliven the proclamation of the Gospel in the love of God.

Going into all the world solely to proclaim apart from tangible care and concern for the needs of the peoples is not the biblical vision for missions. Rather, as the Church sends missionaries out, she recognizes the need to do tangible good for the peoples she seeks to reach with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Church History shows that the churches that are most heavenly minded are the ones that have done the most earthly good.

FRAMEWORK: Sending and Supporting

Grounded on the theological foundation articulated above, the elders of Sun Valley Church have adopted the following framework for sending and supporting missionaries and pursuing the mission that Christ has commanded her to serve:

(1) Means to Reach the Goal and Target Pursuits

In the pursuit of the discipleship of every people, the Church has many resources at its disposal. In a world as diverse as it is, not every method of missions is equally helpful in every place. While the theology and aim of missions, as outlined above, is universal and directly arises from the Word of God, the New Testament pattern of missionary work is one of various means to reach the goal. The Apostle Paul wrote that within the bounds of God's Word, he became all things to all people *in order to reach some* (1 Co 9:19-22).

Recognizing the diverse circumstances that missionaries face, some are able to go with the Gospel and openly evangelize and disciple. Concurrently, the fact that so many unreached people groups exist within politically restrictive and formally hostile states necessitates the creative employment of other means, such as business development that both benefits the people (love of neighbor), as well as serves as a Gospel platform from which to share Christ and disciple believers. In these harder to reach places, church planting often looks different (i.e., smaller gatherings of believers in homes, listening to sermons Online and observing the Lord's Supper) than in places that do not persecute congregations with concentrated hostility. Moreover, in many situations it is more strategic and effective to send a missionary with the aim of training indigenous church leaders rather than remain in the foreground of church leadership long-term.

The elders of Sun Valley Church will evaluate all potential missionaries and their strategies based on the seeming appropriateness of the strategy to the service of the missionary endeavor (as outlined above) in each proposed location and people group.

While the elders recognize the legitimacy and good of numerous missionary pursuits, they have chosen to limit their missionary focuses to church planting and Bible translation among unreached people groups. What church planting looks like among a given people group is largely dependent upon the specifics of the socio-cultural and political circumstances of each target region, and will be evaluated by the elders on a case-by-case basis.

(2) Sending Missionaries

(a) Assessing Missionaries

Missionaries should be among the most capable and mature believers in the Church, because they are being sent to evangelize and mature others in Christ. When Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch, they were sent out from among the ranks of local church leadership (Acts 13:2), indicating that missionaries should be spiritually mature (according to 1 Tim 3 and Tit 1:5-9). They should also possess the skills and discipline necessary for the work they are proposing to do (whether running a business as a platform, teaching, or formal church planting). Because of the spiritually sensitive nature of missionary ministry, missionary

candidates must have a deep grasp of the Bible and doctrine, though this does not necessarily translate into formal Bible training in each instance. Ideally, missionary candidates sent by SVC will be faithful and fruitful members of SVC, and are willing to submit to the board of elders in their ministry. *The elders of SVC will consider these areas of qualifications in assessing potential missionaries.*

(b) Training Missionaries

The best training for vocational missions is faithful, fruitful church membership and ministry. *Once a missionary candidate (including a candidate family) has been identified, the elders of SVC are committed to developing a personal candidacy plan that includes reading and discussion with various elders, personal biblical counseling, evaluation of missionary interest and location, teaching opportunities within SVC, and mission-minded opportunities in and around Yakima. Candidates may be encouraged to serve for a season with one of SVC's missionaries, or to pursue some form of formal biblical training. The elders will work with candidates to come up with a plan for support-raising, or will stay attuned to support-raising issues in concert with candidates' mission agencies, if applicable.*

(c) Sending Agencies and Partner Churches

While the local Church is responsible for the sending, oversight, and care of her missionaries, local churches are rarely equipped to function logistically as a sending agency for their missionaries, nor to supply enough financial support to where other partner churches are not needed. (Partnership in missionary work across churches is seen as a biblical model in places such as 3 John, as well as in the ministry of Paul; see Philippians 4.)

Missionaries sent from Sun Valley Church will probably work with a faithful, elder-approved sending agency, and receive support from other partner churches, but will remain accountable to SVC's elders, who will work in concert with the sending agency in the oversight and care of missionaries.

(d) Caring for Missionaries

As seen in passages such as Acts 14:26-28, missionary fellowship, support, and care from sending churches is vital to the stability, vitality, and longevity of the Great Commission work. *Sun Valley Church commits to regularly pray for her missionaries, check in with her missionaries for the purposes of encouragement and accountability, and to meet for counseling and support at missionaries' request, either in person or Online. At least once annually, each missionary/missionary couple will be asked to complete a report, focusing on the missionary's spiritual growth, spiritual health, physical wellness, financial situation, and other pertinent life areas. If in the course of ongoing support, evaluation, and care it becomes clear that a missionary is not a good fit for his placement, SVC will work with the missionary and his sending agency (if applicable) to form a plan to vacate the field.*

(3) Short Term Mission Teams

Short term missions teams too often do little good, draining resources and distracting long-term missionaries for the sake of an experience rather than helping and supporting the Gospel work that God is already doing—however, this does not need to be the case. *In evaluating and planning short term mission work, the elders of SVC will work with the church's missionaries to assess ministry needs, and to develop teams that will serve the tangible needs and ongoing*

work of the long term missions to which SVC is committed. These teams will generally be selected from within the congregation, with three particular types of people in mind: (1) those skilled for the work at hand; (2) those who have not been meaningfully connected to the mission work of SVC; and (3) those who are considering vocational missions.

(4) Affiliates

In the purpose of the Great Commission and in the midst of a broken world, there are a number of causes that bring glory to Christ and to which believers are called and impassioned by God to serve, yet which individual local churches cannot actively oversee. Such specific ministries include needs such as addressing poverty, homelessness, and abortion, as well as ministering to specific populations. SVC's elders elect to support and encourage the saints to serve with select, explicitly Gospel-centered ministries that are able to focus resources and energy to important causes such as these in a way that individual local churches are not. *Affiliate ministries will be assessed by the elders of SVC on a case-by-case basis, and must be overtly Gospel-centered and serving a focused need that SVC is not individually equipped to meet. The elders will bi-annually review whether particular affiliate ministries are still a good fit, and opt out of affiliation with any ministries that are no longer compatible with a Gospel-centered ministry approach.*