

RIVER CITY GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

**PHILOSOPHY OF MISSIONS,
WITH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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**Philosophy of Missions
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I. Why a Philosophy of Missions?

Thank you for taking the time to read our Philosophy of Missions. We have drafted this important document with a desire to glorify our God and Savior by obeying His revealed will in the Scriptures (2 Cor 4:15). Accordingly, we intend for this philosophy to clarify our understanding of our mission as a church, as He has written in the Scriptures. With clear biblical guidelines, we can consistently evaluate our faithfulness to God and to what He has called us. More specifically, the philosophy we have outlined herein can serve River City Grace Community Church in our pursuit of faithfulness to the Lord in at least two key areas:

- Stewardship of our congregation's resources, whether spiritual or material.
- Leadership of our congregation in partnering with others outside our congregation, as well as sending and supporting our own members.

In short, this Philosophy of Missions is offered to prevent us from haphazardly carrying out God's work and to promote our overall purpose as a church in the area of missions: *to see God exalted as His grace and truth in Jesus Christ abound in and overflow to more and more people.*

II. Theology of Missions

A. Definition of Missions

Any discussion of "mission" or "missions" in relationship to the church must begin with a clear definition of these words, which, though commonly used, are frequently misunderstood. And since much debate and divergent opinions regarding what Christians mean by "mission" (or of more recent coinage, "missional") have been offered in recent years, the potential for confusion has not decreased.

Neither "mission" or "missions" (or "missionaries" or "missional") are words that are explicitly used in Scripture. However, this is not to say that they cannot be helpful labels for what Scripture teaches to be the principle function or task that has been assigned to the Church by her Head and Lord, Christ Jesus. Specifically, we find that Scripture teaches:

Jesus Christ our Lord has commanded His Church to go throughout the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ by preaching His Gospel, and to establish Jesus' disciples (Christians) as biblically-ordered local congregations which endeavor to continue the same work among every language and people and nation in the world.

This is the primary mandate with which the Church has been entrusted by Christ in the present age, as revealed in Scripture. It is this biblical mandate that we define as our *mission* as a Church. Likewise, when we refer to “missions,” we mean those activities that churches undertake in obedience to this very mandate. Or, when we describe an individual who is exclusively devoted to carrying out this command beyond our local Church congregation, we call him or her a “missionary.”

Traditionally, Christians have described this mandate as the “Great Commission,” specifically referring to the passages of Scripture in which Christ gave these orders to His Apostles, who were the human foundation for His Church (see Matt 28:16-20; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; cf. Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:46-49). Accordingly, obedience to this order is exemplified in the Apostles’ pattern of ministry (e.g., Rom 10:13-15; 15:18-21; Acts 14:21-23; 26:16-18; Titus 1:5; 3 John 5-8).

B. Biblical Principles

1. Make Disciples of Jesus Christ (Our Task)¹

A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ, a new creation, one who has been born from above, a learner who abides in His Word. Simply put, a disciple is *a Christian* (2 Cor 5:17; John 1:12-13; 3:3; 8:31).

The Lord Jesus Christ has given the Church her marching orders. Her clear and unique task is to go into the world to *make disciples* (Matt 28:19-20). This work is to be carried out by the faithful preaching of the Gospel (Rom 10:5-17; 1 Cor 1:18-2:15), empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), for the ultimate purpose of the glory of God in Christ (John 15:8; Rom 11:36).

2. Throughout the World (Our Territory)

As God has designed to gather to Himself people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev 7:9-12), so the work of missions is to be global in its scope (Acts 13:47). The Lord Jesus intends for the witness of His church to be ever expanding geographically (Acts 1:8), and the Apostle Paul exemplified this pioneering spirit (Acts 13-28; Rom 15:19-21).

¹ The framework of “Task, Territory, and Target” comes from *For The Sake of His Name*, by Doran, Johnson, and Eckman (Allen Park, MI: Student Global Impact, 2002) Chapters 4-7.

God is passionately committed to His name being spread and exalted among all the nations (Isa 12:4; 49:6; 66:19; Matt 6:9). The teaching from the beginning of Scripture (Gen 12:3) to the end (Rev 5:9) is that God is committed to magnifying His name by redeeming for Himself a people from all the peoples of the world. It is important to note that God is perfectly glorious and self-sufficient within the Trinity, and has no need of praise from men and women. But in His sovereign love, He has purposed to share the beauty of His glory with individuals so that they may joyfully know and worship Him (Acts 17:24-28). What an encouragement it is to know that God will fulfill this purpose, and that one day people from every tongue, tribe, and nation will be gathered around the throne to praise the Lamb (Rev 7:9-12).

3. Establish His Disciples as Biblically-Ordered, Local Congregations (Our Target)

The priority of the church is evident throughout the New Testament. In its essence, the “church” is the gathering of God’s people. Jesus promised that He would build His church (Matt 16:18), which He has purchased with His very blood (Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25). Paul sought to gather believers and establish local churches wherever he went (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). It is in the context of the local church that believers are taught and grow into maturity (Eph 4:1-16; Titus 2:1-15), are equipped for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-12), minister their spiritual gifts (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12), fulfill the biblical “one anothers” (John 13:34,35), are held accountable (Heb 10:24,25), and are spiritually cared for through the shepherding of godly elders (1 Tim 3:1-7; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4). In short, the local church is the environment where believers in Christ pursue an ongoing life of discipleship together. Therefore, the full work of missions is seen not only in preaching the Gospel and seeing people come to faith in Christ, but in gathering and establishing new believers into biblically-ordered local churches.

4. Which Have the Same Aim in every Language, People, and Nation (Our Template)

While the work of missions occurs in myriads of different cultural contexts, among people of vastly different cultural backgrounds, God’s purposes in Christ are the same for everyone, everywhere. Namely, God in Christ is gathering a people for His own possession (Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9,10), redeeming them through His blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 1:18,19), that they might be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:28-30), and spend eternity worshipping His transcendent glory (Rev 7:9-12). Therefore, since every local church belongs to God, it must have the same biblical aim and focus, and pursue faithfulness to all that Christ commands, in whatever cultural context it exists.

C. Implications

1. Missions is From the Local Church as Led by Elders (Our Polity)

A biblically-ordered local church assumes the presence of godly elders who provide shepherding oversight of God's people (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-3). While the church's missions work is to be directed and overseen by the elders, this work would necessarily involve the whole church body. We see in Acts 13:1-4 that it was the local church that was responsible for the sending of those who were "*set apart*" as missionaries. It must be also noted that it was to that local church that those who were sent out returned to give a report and an accounting of what God had accomplished through them (Acts 14:26-28). The primacy of the local church (as the "pillar and support of the truth," 1 Tim 3:15) means that it is entrusted with the privilege and responsibility to faithfully carry out Christ's mission for His church.

2. Missions is Church-Planting (Our Primary Priority)

Distinct from the countless ways that Christians may continually do good to all men (Gal 6:10), the work of missions is making disciples of Jesus Christ by preaching the Gospel and establishing His disciples as biblically-ordered churches. Indeed, members of each local church should overflow in genuine love for all (Rom 12:9). This expression of love would include such works as evangelism, ministries of mercy, disaster relief, crisis pregnancy centers, and providing for the impoverished (cf. Matt 5:16; Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14). These works can only be considered missions if they are directly and explicitly contributing to the planting and strengthening of local churches.

Our missions' priority, therefore, is the planting of new churches. The priority of church-planting is clearly revealed in the ministry of Paul as we see in Romans 15:19-25. Paul states "that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the Gospel of Christ" and his ambition was to "preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest he build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." Paul, then declares in verse 23, that he "no longer has any room for work in these regions." Paul's claim to have "fulfilled the ministry of the Gospel of Christ" and to have "no more room for work" cannot mean that every single person in the entire region has heard and responded to the Gospel, and there exist no more converts to be won throughout this entire area. What this does signify is that Paul has established churches in strategic centers such as Thessalonica, Corinth and

Ephesus. Therefore he no longer has any room to establish churches (“work”) in these regions.

We conclude what Paul is saying in Romans 15:19-25 is that his missionary work is completed when a foundation of growing, reproducing local churches has been established. It is from these churches that evangelism goes forth and disciples are made, baptized, and taught the Word of God.

Paul’s primary goal was churches planted, not simply converts won; this must also be our principal goal in fulfilling the mission of the church. We therefore must give priority to the planting of churches among the unreached, “those who have never been told of Him,” (Rom 15:21) and everything else must be subordinate to this goal.

3. Missions Involves Church-Strengthening (Our Secondary Priority)

Because the aim of missions is the establishment of biblically-ordered and healthy local churches, a major element of that aim is to strengthen churches that already exist. This is exactly why Paul deployed his co-worker Titus to the island of Crete, that he might “set in order what remains” (Titus 1:5) among existing, though weak and immature, churches. So while missions in its essence is church-planting, it also clearly involves the strengthening of churches through biblical instruction, equipping, and encouragement to faithfully carry out the work of missions throughout the world.

Strengthening churches can involve, but is not limited to, providing theological training to pastors, church leaders or members aspiring to leadership, sending members of RCG for short-term ministry in teaching and equipping, and providing practical resources.

4. Missions Includes Church-Centered Partnerships (Our Position on Partnerships)

We define a partnership as *a temporary, renewable, formal association of two or more autonomous and like-minded Christian bodies who have formed a trusting relationship and seek to fulfill agreed-upon expectations by sharing complementary strengths and resources to reach their mutual goals.*²

We see the benefit of partnering with like-minded churches (and missionaries sent out by them) and some parachurch organizations (and individuals commissioned by a local

² Ed Roberts, “Missions Partnerships from a Field Worker’s Perspective,” *9Marks Journal* 6, no. 4 (July-August 2009), <http://www.9marks.org/journal/missions> (accessed August 21, 2012).

church who serve in these organizations) as we seek to carry out our Lord's commission. It is our expectation that any partnership will require an affirmation of our form of doctrine as expressed in our Statement of Faith and Philosophy of Missions. (See River City Grace Church Statement of Faith)

Note: A word about partnering with Parachurch Organizations

How do parachurch organizations fit into a biblical theology of missions? A parachurch organization is a Christian ministry that does Christian work, but does not function as a local church.³ Although parachurch ministries are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, they are not inherently unbiblical. In fact, they can be quite helpful if they do not ignore the clear biblical focus on the local church as God's central avenue of the ministry of the Gospel. Parachurch organizations are helpful to the degree that they see themselves, in philosophy and practice, as providing assistance to the local church.

It is also important to note that individuals seeking to be involved in parachurch organizations (whether in the US or in another part of the world) should seek the counsel of their local church's elders.

III. Strategy of Missions

A. Accountability

Consistent with their shepherding and overseeing responsibilities, the elders are accountable for all of RCG's missions partnerships and endeavors.

B. Missions Support Priorities

Our primary focus will be the supporting of and participating in those missions activities and enterprises (evangelism, training, etc.), which are focused on making disciples, resulting in the establishment and/or strengthening of biblically-ordered local churches.

Geographically, our *first priority* is to support, send and/or partner with missionaries who are seeking to carry out our definition and philosophy of missions overseas.

³ The local church is distinguished from a parachurch organization in that a local church is comprised of a clearly identified membership (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-3); is overseen and protected by qualified and duly-appointed elders (Acts 20:17, 28-31; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-3); gathers regularly for corporate worship, the reading and preaching of God's word (Acts 2:42-47; Heb 10:24,25); the celebration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper (1 Cor 11:23-26; Matt 28:19); and practices church discipline (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-5).

Our *second priority* is to support the same, domestically.

Our *third priority* is to fund and help those who function in a supporting role. This would include mission workers who function in an administrative or field support role, or those who help develop evangelistic resources for field workers (such as Bible translations, etc.). However, the Bible indicates that the majority of those who serve as missionaries are to be involved in actual Gospel proclamation, with a fewer number of support staff (Acts 20:33-35; 1 Thess 2:9; 3 John 5-8). This does not mean that support staff is less important or less glorifying to God. It does mean that we seek to allocate the majority of our support to those who are on the field, proclaiming the Gospel.

C. Criteria for Missionary Selection

We see in Acts 13:1-3 that through the church, biblically qualified men were “set apart” to be “sent out” for the proclamation and spread of the Gospel. Given the biblical priorities of the proclamation of the Gospel and the teaching of the Word of God with the goal of establishing local churches, the selection of those with whom we partner is crucial. Therefore we have established the following criteria for the selection of those with whom we have the privilege of partnering.

- The missionary and ministry with which he/she is involved must have a clearly defined objective, consistent with this Philosophy of Missions and our ministry priorities (Vision of Grace), and must affirm the form of doctrine as expressed in our Statement of Faith.
- Since we believe that those we support must be biblically qualified for leadership in character and doctrine, each missionary must demonstrate godly character and competence to fulfill his/her ministry which has been affirmed by their local church or the elders of RCG.
- Any missionary or mission agency desiring our financial support and/or partnership must be interviewed by the elders before being considered.

D. Congregational Participation

As missions is the very heart of the church (Matt 28:18-20), we want to pray and work toward seeing this “culture of missions” developed among the whole congregation. This can occur in a number of ways:

Investment

Financial Support – Through the regular giving of God’s people at RCG, as stewarded by the elders, care will be given to both ongoing and special financial needs of the missionaries and ministries we partner with.

Intercession

Prayer – We will keep the missionaries and ministries with whom we partner before the congregation for prayer. This can include:

- Prayer, public and corporate , for missionaries during morning and/or evening Services.
- Ongoing inclusion in the prayer bulletin.
- Keeping the congregation aware of specific prayer requests the missionaries may have.
- Praying regularly for God to raise up more missionaries from among the body at RCG.

Involvement

Encouragement – We will seek to encourage our missionaries by:

- Maintaining open communication with them (through e-mail, letter, or phone) regarding the joys, struggles, and opportunities of their ministries.
- Engaging church members to send gifts or notes of encouragement to missionaries.
- Sending an elder, deacon or RCG member, as may be appropriate, to minister to them and better understand the nature of their ministry.

- Sending a RCG elder for the purpose of preaching, teaching, training, and strengthening as opportunities arise to meet specific ministry needs of the missionaries.
- Receiving regular reports from missionaries and, when available, visits to RCG for the encouragement of both the missionary and the congregation.
- Raising short-term teams for missionaries and ministries with whom we partner.
- Providing support for RCG members who desire to participate in short-term teams not directly connected with RCG .
- Training and equipping those from RCG who believe they are called to long-term missions.
- Providing resources on missions, by strategically providing excellent books, DVDs, sermons, and other resources to the congregation which will encourage their understanding of, and zeal for, missions.

IV. Policies & Procedures

A. Roles and Responsibilities

Given that it is the privilege and responsibility of the church to carry out the work of missions (See *Theology of Missions*, above), we must do so in a manner that accords with our biblical mandate and is consistent with our leadership structure. In keeping with our polity as expressed in the Constitution and Bylaws of RCG⁴ and Statement of Faith⁵ we set forth the following roles and responsibilities:

1. Elders

- a. The elders will have oversight of RCG's missions partnerships and endeavors (POM Section II.C.1 and III.A).
- b. The elders are to ensure that all missionary efforts are consistent with RCG's Philosophy of Missions.
- c. The elders may appoint a "Deacon of Mission Partnerships" as necessary to facilitate the administration of the missionary partnerships.

2. Deacons – A Deacon of Mission Partnerships would serve by facilitating the following:

- a. Administration of the finances.
- b. Communication with the elders, missionary partners and the congregation.
- c. Development and leadership of a team of RCG members as necessary to carry out these responsibilities.

3. Congregation

- a. Participating in the consideration and affirmation process of all missionary partnerships.
- b. Partnering with the missionaries through prayer, faithful financial support, and various other ways (e.g., personal contact, short-term trips, etc.).

B. Establishing, Evaluating and, Maintaining Missionary Partnerships with those outside RCG

1. The elders will have the responsibility to oversee the evaluation (as described below), of each missionary partnership request, and determine which potential partnerships will be brought before the congregation for further evaluation and affirmation.

⁴ Constitution and Bylaws, Article V Section 1 "Elders" and 2 "Deacons". Article VII, "Committees and Ministry Groups"

⁵ RCG Statement of Faith, Article 7 "The Church"

2. Evaluation – *Philosophy Of Missions Section III. C – Criteria for Missionary Selection*

Given the biblical priorities of the proclamation of the Gospel and the teaching of the Word of God with the goal of establishing local churches, the selection of those with whom we partner in missions is crucial. Therefore we have established the following criteria for the selection of those with whom we have the privilege of partnering.

- The missionary and ministry with which he/she is involved must have a clearly defined objective, consistent with this Philosophy of Missions and our ministry priorities (Vision of Grace), and must affirm the form of doctrine as expressed in our Statement of Faith.
- Since we believe that those we support must be biblically qualified for leadership in character and doctrine, each missionary must demonstrate godly character and competence to fulfill his/her ministry which has been affirmed by their local church and/or the elders of RCG.

3. Congregational Affirmation

Desiring the whole congregation to be involved in our ministry partnerships, the elders will keep the congregation informed of potential partnerships being considered. Once a missionary or ministry has been evaluated by the elders as outlined above, and the elders desire to pursue a partnership, the missionary or ministry shall be submitted before the church members for further evaluation, questions and/or clarifications regarding their ministry. A period of 2-4 weeks will be given for congregational input and affirmation before a final decision is made by the elders regarding a potential missionary partnership.

4. Missionary/Ministry Partnerships Outside of RCG

Any individual missionary or ministry outside of RCG seeking partnership/support from RCG should send a request for the same to the Elders. Upon review, the Elders may set up a time to interview the applicant. The Elders will then make a prayerful determination if the partnership/support process is to move forward.

5. Missionary/Ministry Partnerships Contact and Accountability

The elders, with the involvement of the Deacon of Mission Partnerships and RCG members, will maintain ongoing contact with the missionaries and ministries with whom we partner. Mutual communication on a regular basis must be maintained for the accountability and encouragement necessary for an effective partnership.

6. Missionary / Ministry Partnerships Reevaluation

While it is the desire of River City Grace Community Church to enter into and maintain a long-term relationship with our missionary partners, any significant changes to doctrinal positions, personal or ministry status, and/or type of service for which RCG originally undertook the partnership will require reevaluation.

C. Recruitment, Training, and Sending of Missionaries from within RCG

In the regular life, worship, and witness of the body at RCG, God may be pleased to raise up those He is calling to serve as missionaries. Indeed, we pray and hope this will occur with increasing frequency (Mt. 9:36-38)!

As any given Member of RCG desires to serve God in this way, the Elders, in conjunction with the whole church body, will prayerfully work with the individual in equipping, assessing, and sending them – as the Lord directs. Likewise, the Elders and congregation will provide ongoing support, encouragement, and accountability for missionaries that have been sent from RCG.

This is the pattern we see demonstrated in Acts chapters 13 and 14, as it was in the context of a local church that missionaries were identified, trained, affirmed, sent, encouraged, supported, and held accountable. All of this focused on the missionary's work of proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples, and planting/strengthening churches.

D. Financial Considerations and Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this financial policy is to serve as a guideline for decision-making regarding the distribution of funds and other resources entrusted to RCG.

2. General Provisions for Missionaries/Mission Agencies RCG supports and partners with:

At the determination of the Elders, monies from the RCG General Fund will be annually designated for the financial support of those missionaries/mission agencies with whom we have chosen to partner. The allocation of the funds will be considered in light of the support guidelines as identified above in POM Section III. B.

The Elders will annually review the distribution of finances to our partnering missionaries/mission agencies and provide regular reports to the congregation.

3. Financial Support for Short-Term Mission Activities:

Potential “short-term mission activities” fall into two categories: those connected with RCG missions partnerships, and those not connected with RCG missions partnerships. The Deacon of Missions Partnerships will work with the Elders to outline specific considerations in each category, but the general framework is given below.

a. Connected with RCG Mission Partnerships

At times the missionaries/ministries we support may request help in the form of a short-term ministry team. Requested help may include areas such as preaching, teaching, training, evangelism, and various special projects. All requests will be considered through the Deacon of Mission Partnerships, in connection with the Elders. Care will be given to ensure that the tasks and goals of a short-term team will be consistent with our POM.

b. Not Connected with RCG Mission Partnerships

At other times, members of RCG may have opportunity to participate in short-term missions which are not connected with RCG missions partnerships. Members interested in such opportunities are asked to submit a *Short-Term Ministry Application* (See Appendix 1) to the Deacon of Mission Partnerships. The application will be reviewed by the Deacon of Mission Partnerships and the Elders, who will then interact with the applicant about the approval or denial of their request.

c. Financial Support

For both categories, financial support for short-term trips will usually come from three sources:

- The Loren Zook Memorial Account of the church’s general fund.
- Funds from the solicitation of church members and others outside RCG
- The individual’s personal funds.

4. Financial Support For Missionary Visits to RCG

1. Honorarium - TBD
2. Travel - TBD

**Appendix 1:
Application for Short-Term Ministry Support**

Name: _____ Birth date: _____.

Phone: _____ Email: _____.

Shortly describe the logistical details of your trip (i.e., location, dates, what you will be doing/nature of your involvement, name of sponsor organization, etc.):

I have been attending RCG for _____ year(s) and have been a member since _____.

Please describe your areas of service within the congregation of RCG:

What are your long-term vocational/career/ goals?

Please describe some of the reasons motivating your desire to participate in this trip:

Please describe ways that you think you are currently growing as a Christian:

Do you have concerns about participating on this trip (if so, please describe):

If this is an overseas trip, have you traveled overseas previously? If so, please briefly describe those experiences:

Do you have any medical conditions that might affect your participation (if so, please describe)?

The total cost for the trip is \$_____. I expect that I can provide \$_____ through my own resources and through support from close friends and family.

Please Check the option(s) that fit your situation:

____ I am requesting financial assistance from RCG.

____ I am requesting an endorsement from the Elders as I seek to raise support from individuals within RCGs congregation.

(Feel free to attach an additional sheet of paper if more space is needed for any questions).

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for Missionaries/Ministries RCG Currently Supports

Name of Missionary/Ministry: _____

Please help us better understand your current ministry:

- What do you think the primary purpose of your ministry is?
- In practical terms, how do you carry out this purpose?
- Describe the types of resources (for evangelism, discipleship, etc.) you use in your ministry.
- In addition to God's word, what 3-4 books have been most influential in shaping your understanding of missions?
- Explain your involvement in a local church.
- Explain how your ministry fits into the work of the local church.
- How do you define "success" in your ministry?

Please Indicate Your Position on the Following Topics:

- Are you in complete agreement with RCG's Philosophy of Missions?
- If not, what areas would you question or disagree with?
- Explain your view of the local church. What is its role in missions? How important is it for a Christian to be involved in a local church?
- What is the best way for us to contact you (email, mail, phone)? Please provide your contact information.