

MISSION EMPHASIS: A HOW-TO GUIDE

Introduction

A Springboard for Action

Mission emphasis events provide a special opportunity to praise and thank God for what he is doing to advance His kingdom. It is a time when a local congregation can focus attention on the work of missions-at home and abroad.

By reading this, you have already shown a desire to expand and sharpen the mission focus of your church. Your interest in creating a successful mission emphasis event is the result of the Holy Spirit working to strengthen and expand God's Kingdom. This information is not intended to be an exhaustive list of ideas but to serve as a springboard for your church's needs and creativity. Add your own ideas and freely adapt the ones given.

A Successful Mission Emphasis events can...

1. Unite church members, missionaries, and guests to work for a specific cause.
2. Share what is being done on your behalf in local and overseas ministry.
3. Give missionaries and church representatives an opportunity to share what God is doing through their work.
4. Increase prayer and financial support for ministry.
5. Strengthen and encourage the work through a time of sharing with faithful supporters.
6. Produce positive feelings about being part of God's mission plan and helps to stimulate interest and involvement in missions throughout the year.
7. Challenge people to get involved in short-term or career missions.

Initial Plans

Most mission emphasis events get started with the local church council. To get the event off the ground, it is imperative to enlist plenty of prayer support and the skills of a good planning team.

The team could include:

- Individuals from the mission/evangelism committee
- A group of mission-minded church members
- A church-school teacher or parent who can identify children's needs and interests
- Individuals who are detail-oriented or have strong organization skills
- A member of the worship committee

Dates and Preparation Time

As a committee, choose a preferred and alternative date for the event. Be open and flexible. The date may change depending on the availability of speakers, facilities, etc.

Remember that a mission emphasis event takes time! Give yourself and your church council, committees, and groups enough time to prepare. This could be a couple of months for a missionary visit or six to 12 months for a missions emphasis week.

Getting Started

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The planning team's tasks may be divided into three subteams:

1. The program team
2. The publicity team
3. The food team

Responsibilities:

Chair

Conducts the planning team meetings and keeps record of the major "to do" checklist as tasks are completed.

Program Team

Arranges for the speakers, events, audiovisual programs, and special music.

Publicity Team

Arranges displays, brochures, banners, and other promotional materials.

Food Team

Arranges for meals or refreshments for each of the meetings and the events.

Note: You may want to assign an additional committee for children's activities.

Why Are We Doing This

Before another step, discuss the purposes of your missions emphasis event and write a general statement of what you hope to accomplish. Do you wish to introduce new mission workers to the congregation? Develop a deeper commitment to reach people who do not know the Lord? Keep church members informed about missions work? Discover and nurture prospective missionaries? Encourage greater prayer support?

Goal-Setting

Decide on some specific goals, or statements of measurable outcomes, that will show if you have achieved your purposes. Examples: ten people committing themselves to working for a week in urban ministry; a group of members meeting to pray for the lost before each church service; to increase mission giving in your church by 10 percent.

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Choosing a Theme

Choose a theme that reflects your goals. Select a Scripture passage that reflects your theme. If your theme is not a song title, select a related song that will appeal to children as well as adults.

Suggested Theme Titles:

A Light to the Nations
Across the Street, Across the Sea
Around the World with Christ
Blessed to be a Blessing
Each One Reach One
Attempt Great Things for God
Gather All God's Children
Let the Earth Hear His Voice
Let the Son Shine
Let the Whole World Know
Missions on the March
You Are My Witnesses (Acts 1:8)
Lord of the Harvest
Neighbors-Nearby ... and Far Away
Reaching the Unreached
Saved to Serve
Send Out the Light
Sowing Precious Seeds
Sow ... Reap ... Rejoice (John 4:36)
The Light of the World
The Word for the World
Til the Whole World Knows
You Are My Witnesses

Setting the Budget

When requesting funds from church council for your budget, consider the following:

- Speaker expenses: travel, lodging, meals, babysitting
- Publicity materials: programs, bulletin covers, posters, advertising, material for banners, etc.
- Food: coffee, tea, drinks, snacks, meals
- Miscellaneous expenses: long-distance phone calls, postage, room rentals

If you invite a missionary, check with their sending agency about its policy for reimbursement of travel and lodging expenses. It is helpful if you are able to cover these expenses. If you are unable to reimburse these expenses, however, many agencies do have budget allowances for travel. Generally, mission workers visit churches as part of their work and do not expect an honorarium. Gifts or offerings may be designated for support or travel expenses.

Schedule Speakers

The speaker and the topic will largely contribute to the tone of your mission emphasis event. Contact potential speakers immediately to see if they are available. You may wish to invite missionaries whom you support or contact the mission agencies to see who is available. Don't overlook members of your own congregation. Consider missionary candidates, volunteers, or workers within local service and outreach organizations.

Order a copy of CRC Speakers for a complete list of speakers from CRC agencies and mission organizations, as well as Calvin College, Redeemer College, and The King's University College. You can obtain a copy by calling the CRC office at 905-336-2920 or 800-730-3490.

After the program has been designed, contact the speakers or mission agencies to confirm all arrangements. Ask if the speaker requires any special equipment for his or her presentation.

Sample Schedule

In 1998, Mount Brydges (Ontario) CRC and East and West CRCs, Strathroy, Ontario, celebrated God's work in missions through a collaborative missions emphasis week. This is the schedule they used to raise mission awareness in their congregation.

Notice that the churches scheduled at least one activity that would be of interest to each church group. A good combination of low key and highly organized events at different times of the day enabled many people to attend.

Sunday

am Worship service with guest speakers from the Back to God Hour and World Missions

pm Combined service

Monday

7 pm GEMS and Cadets with a speaker from Youth Unlimited

8 pm Combined church council meeting with speaker from London Ministries

Tuesday

1 pm Missionary visit to a retirement home.

7pm CRWRC volunteer presentation and praise team with combined youth groups

Wednesday

10 am Coffee Break/Story Hour with a visit from the Coffee Break regional representatives

8 pm Women's fellowship with the missionary/missionary spouse

Thursday

10 am Worship service with the missionaries at another retirement home

Friday

9 am Mission presentation at local high school by missionaries

Saturday

7:30 am Men's Life/Promise Keepers with speaker

6 pm A combined church potluck supper from Bikers for Christ

Motivating Programs

When planning your event, pray for the Lord's guidance. Then brainstorm about the kinds of activities you might include in your schedule of events. Schedule the program of your event so that it will accomplish the goals identified earlier. Establish a preliminary schedule and be sure to include children in your plans. Here are some activity ideas to get you started:

Ten Program Ideas for a Lively Missions Emphasis Event

1. Invite mission workers to preach or introduce themselves at Sunday worship services. Include visual aids such as a related banner, flags, artifacts, or a slide program.
2. Incorporate the missions emphasis event Scripture passage into a litany and use a Bible concordance for to find passages related to your text. Reformed Worship (available from Faith Alive Christian Resources at 800-333-8300) is a wonderful resource for service planning, litanies, and worship ideas. Check it out! Thread your theme through the children's message as well. Remember to use visual aids.
3. Plan a special musical program that fits your mission theme. Weave together familiar hymns and praise and worship songs that are easy to learn and sing.
4. Arrange for worship leaders, praise teams, or musicians to help lead worship during the various events.
5. Ask those involved with a particular event or other interested church members to join you for prayer before each event. Pray for the Lord's blessing and that each person attending will be touched powerfully by God's Spirit.
6. Develop a daily devotional guide to be used throughout the weeks or days of your mission emphasis event. Your pastor or a gifted person in your congregation may be willing to write this guide. Or adapt missionary letters for this purpose.

7. There are artistically gifted people in every church! Ask them to direct a drama. Check Faith Alive or your local Christian bookstore for suitable scripts. Go one step further and ask the youth in your church to write the script and be the actors. For a Faith Alive catalogue, call 800-333-8300.
8. Involve children in your time of missions emphasis. For instance, provide time for crafts, poster contests, map-making, puppet shows, and storytelling.
9. Ask missionaries, pastors, and gifted members to lead seminars on missions and evangelism. Where appropriate, ask missionary teens to talk to teen, groups or the church-school children.
10. With a few church families, meet informally at home with your missionary- Getting to know your missionary can be a rewarding experience that results in a lifetime of friendship!

For the Adventurous...

- If your congregation has had mission emphasis events for several years, you may be looking for some new ways to present the mission message. Consider these ideas to pump new vigor into your church's passion for missions.
- Organize a theme night to teach the congregation about a specific mission in your church. Use costumes, videos, and artifacts to educate about a particular geographic region.
- If your missionary can't make it to your event, connect them live to your congregation on a speaker phone during a special event or worship service!
- Act out a drama set in the country or city where a missionary is serving. Write the missionary and ask for information about food, culture, current events, and other items of interest. Members could also write and perform the skit based on information from the missionary's newsletters. Give a video-taped copy of the drama as a gift to your missionary.
- Plan a classis-wide missions emphasis week or invite several CRC or evangelical churches nearby to join you in a combined program. This way, you can share expenses and give mission workers the opportunity to speak to several congregations at once. Either begin or end your week with a mass meeting for all the participating congregations.

- Plan a church talent night with music and drama. Use a theme such as "Develop Your Gifts for Ministry" to reinforce your congregation's commitment. This may spur on members to attend a missions workshop or volunteer on an overseas work team. Consider giving awards for different areas of talent.
- Highlight volunteer opportunities during a worship service or special event. Contact mission agencies and local ministries for displays and volunteer opportunities to promote. Recognize people that already volunteer by highlighting the ways in which they serve.

Reserve the Right Facilities

Decide what kind of facilities you will need for each part of your program and how much space is required. Will you need to rent a school gym or will your own church suffice? What special sound equipment will you require? What seating arrangements would you like?

After consulting with the food team about their needs, make the reservations. Arrange, for a team of volunteers to help you setup any tables or chairs, do the dishes, and cleanup. You may wish to arrange for nursery facilities and attendants too.

If required, arrange for audio-visual equipment such as overhead projectors, slide projectors, video projectors, and sound system operation.

The Drawing Factor...Food

One of the most effective ways to have a good turnout for your event is to use food as a drawing factor. Build in a communications loop between the program and food teams so that no details are missed.

The food team can recruit volunteers as needed to accomplish their goals. At least one person on the food team should have experience with planning meals for large groups.

Good Food, Good Fun, Great Missions!

Here are a few ideas for using food to draw a crowd:

- For summer events, plan an ice cream or strawberry social on a Sunday afternoon. Set up mission displays and play some missions-related games.
- Invite a cell group, household of faith, or church district to host a missionary family or short-term missionary volunteer for an afternoon or evening, a meeting or a meal.
- Host a pancake breakfast or brunch for men, women, or the whole family. Ask a ministry worker to share about his or her work. Enjoy the fellowship!
- Host a hunger awareness meal (for details, contact CRWRC at 800-730-3490 or 9057336-2920).
- Plan an international potluck, where participants are encouraged to bring foods from many different countries (i.e. Italian, Mexican, Asian, Dutch, etc.). Or focus your dinner on a particular geographic region and choose foods that are commonly eaten there.
- After an evening potluck, divide into small groups to hear mission presentation. Rotate the schedule so that church members can hear the presentations of several mission workers.

Don't let the food get cold!

Want to speed up your buffet lines? Ask people to place their food contributions on the table in front of their place settings. Divide the rows of tables into groups of two.

People sitting on the inside of each pair of tables walk clockwise around the inside while serving themselves. People on the outside walk clockwise around the outside of the tables. All people are being served at one time and are finished serving and eating at the same time. For second helpings, people are invited to explore any of the tables. This avoids long lines and shortens the time needed for eating.

Making a Checklist

Along with the full congregational events, assess and arrange the food requirements for the smaller gatherings.

1. Which events need food or refreshments?
2. What facilities are needed to prepare and serve the food? Forward your requirements to the program team.
3. Who is in charge of the food for each event?
4. What food is needed?
5. Who is responsible for table settings and decorations?

Publicity How-Tos

The attendance at your mission emphasis event depends greatly on how well you promote it.

Start early!

Let people know what your plans are as soon as you can. It can take up to seven advertisements before the date and announcements begin to sink in.

- The starting point for all of the publicity that follows is determining a theme. Display the theme on banners, bulletin boards, flyers, bulletin covers, brochures, and other promotional resources. To get ideas, contact the denominational missions agencies for samples. Look over back issues of Reformed Worship and other banner-making resources for visually appealing ways to make your event stand out. Be bold and use lots of color!
- Contact your missionary well in advance for country or ministry facts and prayer requests. Set up a display area containing enlarged photographs, artifacts, brochures maps, etc.
- Create a banner for your event, hang it at the front of the sanctuary two to three weeks before your event. Have an explanation printed in the bulletin with a few quick facts about missions to spark people's interest and curiosity. Another source for banner ideas is Banners for Worship by Carol Jean Harms (1988 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Miss.).

- Order missions-related bulletin covers or ask a student or artist to design one for you. Start writing bulletin announcements about six weeks prior to the event. The first few announcements should be teasers. The remaining ones should spell out the five Ws: who, where, when, why, and what.
- Distribute flyers in church mailboxes or in the bulletin the week before and the week of the event. Do not leave them on a table-they will not get read! List the different activities or events with the phone number of whom to contact for further information.
- Ask an articulate member of the team to make a public announcement the Sunday before the event.
- Contact local radio stations and newspapers and share events that might, be of interest to the broader public. Local news media are always interested by featuring a hometown resident who works abroad.

Helpful Hints in Brochure Design

1. Set deadlines for the production and completion of the brochure.
2. Acquire speakers' pictures and biographical information to profile them in the brochure.
3. Highlight the schedule of events, speakers, and the goals of your event.
4. Get cost estimates for printing or copying the brochure.
5. Have two people proof the final product to ensure against errors, and typos.