



### ***Churches: Essential Partners in the Missionary Task***

I was doing some research on the International Mission Board (IMB) web site and found some wonderful and interesting articles on missions and missionaries. This article that follows caught my attention relative to Engage Ecuador 2019. Being the mission minded church that we are, what captivated me was its title, “Churches: Essential Partners in the Missionary Task”. After reading the article, I believe that it properly characterizes our engagement in Ecuador as we know it today and what are 6 tasks should be. Equally important, this puts us in lockstep with SBC’s IMB and the training material that brother Bob is considering for us to use in Ecuador, Storying-Training for Trainers (S-T4T).

Interestingly enough and you are probably already thinking it, that this also applies to any other calling our church gets tasked with the expansion of God’s kingdom. Please let me know your thoughts after you read this.

### **[Churches: Essential Partners in the Missionary Task](#)**

D. Ray Davis | January 30, 2018

I’ve noticed a tendency among Christians to think the work of professional missionaries is somehow different from that of churches and their short-term teams. But it’s important to understand that the missionary task is the same for everyone.

“Short-term teams put their hand to the same plow as we do,” said a missionary to me—referring to teams being sent by partner churches. While missionaries are the leaders we have sent to direct the work of the missionary task, it makes sense for partners to come alongside them in the very same task, in intentional ways and in a collaborative manner.

Many things contribute to healthy, synergistic partnerships between missionaries and church partners. Among them are spiritual maturity, humility, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and a passion for God’s glory. But a very practical thing that’s also needed is a clear definition of the missionary task. This is an area where I believe IMB is extremely helpful.

In recent years, IMB has clarified the missionary task in an effort to keep our collective eyes focused—because, let’s be honest, there are a lot of overwhelming needs around the world, and it’s easy to allow needs to dictate and define the work we do.

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What is the Missionary Task?

The core task of missionary teams revolves around six important components. We believe that all mission effort—whether exerted by missionaries or partnering churches—should focus along these lines.

Task One: Entry

Finding and accessing a people or place is the first step. To do this well, worldview and cultural realities must be learned and addressed, including the state of Christianity there. Missionary teams must ask how they’ll access the place and build relationships with the people. That includes learning the language.

Entry is a significant task where church partners contribute, regardless of language skills. For example, an entire church body can specifically pray for access to the people. Mercy ministries teams from partner churches can lead short-term disaster relief projects or provide needed medical services. Strategic efforts like these can open doors that enable long-term missionaries to build relationships of trust with the locals. Further, church partners may bring marketplace expertise that helps create a business or service platform, thereby establishing a credible ongoing presence among a people group.

#### Task Two: Evangelism

Paul asked rhetorically, “How can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14 HCSB). Entry is important, but simply being there is not enough. We enter the lives of people who don’t have the gospel in order to share the gospel with them. Not all have the ability to speak eloquently, but all believers are responsible to proclaim the gospel.

Church partners can bolster a long-term missionary’s evangelistic effort. Following the missionary’s evangelism strategy, well-prepared church partners can help spread the gospel in ways that are both winsome and appropriate to the context.

#### Task Three: Discipleship

The purpose of our mission is to make disciples of Jesus among all nations. Entry and evangelism, while necessary, are not the end goal of our missionary work. Worship is. Therefore, developing new believers into reproducing disciples is paramount.

In recent years, long-term partnerships have increased. One developing trend has been repeated and frequent trips by a church’s short-term teams to the same region, people, and missionary team. Repeat trips are not only encouraging to long-term workers on a personal level, but such trips also supplement their discipleship effort. Furthermore, when short-term teams return home, new technology allows them to stay connected with new believers so discipleship relationships can continue.

#### Task Four: Healthy Church Formation

The development of those new believers into Christ-likeness is best accomplished in the context of a healthy church. When people hear and believe the gospel, they need to be gathered into churches. Those churches will help them to grow in the faith, will provide a place for worship and fellowship, and will send out their own to share the gospel among other people who’ve not heard it. Therefore, a pivotal aspect of the missionary task is church planting.

Church formation takes intentionality and expertise. For this aspect of the missionary task, we need church planters and other church leaders whose skill and experience can aid in the planting of healthy churches. IMB is well-positioned to help Southern Baptist churches and missionaries work together in this way. The opportunities for short-term teams to use what God has given them are plentiful.

#### Task 5: Leadership Development

Forming healthy churches requires the challenging work of raising up local leaders from within the church. Paul directed Timothy to entrust the things he was learning to faithful men who would then also entrust that body of truth to others (2 Tim. 2:2). New churches that remain dependent upon missionaries simply won’t survive.

God has equipped the SBC ecosystem to develop leaders. Seminaries, universities, and churches are filled with well-trained men and women. Intentional partnership with churches across our denomination can open the door for such skilled leaders to invest in a missionary team’s effort as they develop local men and women who will carry the work of the gospel forward in that context. A team could do it alone, but together we can do more.

This crucial step of leadership development sets up the missionary for the last step: partnership and exit.

## Task 6: Partnership and Exit

By now, local leaders who were developed have taken on the responsibility of leading the church. They teach. They shepherd. And they disciple and train new leaders. The missionary and partner churches have passed the baton of leadership and have made it clear that they are not taking it back. Sometimes there is a period of ongoing involvement even after physically leaving—just as we see in the example of the Apostle Paul's ministry.

A partner church can soften the exit by continuing to pray for, visit, encourage, and coach after the long-term missionary has exited and moved to a new assignment. But missionaries and partner churches know their goal is not to be there forever. They must be intentional in their exit.

### Put Your Hand to the Same Plow

Complex work such as entering and gaining access to a people, evangelizing them, discipling new believers, gathering them into healthy churches, developing local leaders, and planning an exit is never as clean as these six phases communicate. However, if you and your church want to impact the nations, these are the six components of the task that must be kept in mind as you lead your church into partnership with a people or place. These components are especially important as you train and send short-term teams.

At the same time, these six elements define the work of professional missionaries. They guide their efforts among the people or places in which they labor. When both missionary and partner church are united in their understanding of the missionary task, a strong bond and effective partnership can be formed as they cooperatively put their hands to the same plow and work together for the expansion of God's kingdom.

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God's Blessings,

Carlos Morales

