

CHURCH-TO-CHURCH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP:
A CASE STUDY OF HOW A HAITIAN CHURCH
IMPACTED A U.S. CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF MISSIONS ^[1]

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Introduction

Church partnerships in missions are nothing new. For example, U.S. churches and organizations have continued to work with the Haitian church (and other organizations) for many years, most recently following the devastating earthquake in 2010. Many churches actively support missions, particularly through short-term teams. After all, sending people on short-term trips to support churches in such areas is a good thing, right? ^[2] However, is sending short-term teams the primary function of U.S. based churches in support of the work of the Church in other locations? What about the relationship of local churches with both international churches and supported missionaries? How do these fit into an overall philosophy of missions for a church and does the current context and emphasis within U.S. based churches mean that a shift is necessary?

Obviously, there are U.S. based churches that have a broader view of their role and responsibility. In fact, over the last century or more, evangelical churches have emphasized sending missionaries to other contexts to spread the gospel. These churches have committed significant financial and human resources to this end. However, even with this historic emphasis, the role of the local church in this enterprise seems to have dwindled over time. In fact, while many churches continue to provide substantial financial support for vocational missionaries and short-term teams there are fewer who have a clear understanding about the type of relationship they should continue to have with both the vocational missionaries they support and those to whom they are ministering in other parts of the world.

This dual role is worth exploring as it seems to be the relationship that Paul had with churches who supported him financially. In Philippians 4:10-17, Paul indicates that it wasn't simply financial support the church was sending but they were actually sharing of their lives with him and were benefiting as a result of the gifts they were giving. He closes by telling the Philippian believers that, as a result of their gift, "I seek the fruit that increases to your credit" (v. 17). Is it possible that God created the church so our collective partnership together as believers located in different areas of the world benefits both and not just the one who received the financial support or the missionary?

This concept of mutual benefit juxtaposes the idea of "supporting churches" vs. "sending churches." This distinction is common and has been used extensively to indicate the different type of relationships that churches may have with missionaries and work they support. For purposes of this paper, supporting churches are those whose primary connection to the ministry context is by providing financial support. Sending churches, on the other hand, are those that have an ongoing relationship with (1) those workers sent to do ministry in another context and (2) those living in that ministry context. The primary difference between supporting churches and sending churches is the ongoing relational component that characterizes the ministry and connection of the church to the ministry context.

This case study will explore a church that has undergone a transformation from being a supporting church to one that develops and maintains relationships with the vocational missionaries supported financially by the church. In addition, the church now emphasizes short-term teams that participate in the ministry contexts of their supported vocational missionaries so that ongoing relationships can be developed and deepened over time. Wan's Relational Paradigm ^[3] will be used as a tool to consider the resultant changes and what this might mean for future church-to-church partnerships.

Grace Baptist Church Case Study

The Church Up to 2010

Grace Baptist Church (GBC) is a member of CB Northwest, an association of Conservative Baptist churches in the Northwest U.S. It is a medium-sized congregation with around 250-300 members and regular attenders. The church was started in the late 19th century in Newberg, OR (under a different name, eventually changed to Grace Baptist), and has had a historic emphasis on missions and missions support. In fact, the Missions Committee is one of only two standing committees specified the church's by-laws in addition to the church board. The current mission statement of GBC is as follows: Worship - Responding to God's Love, Growth - Learning from His Word, Fellowship - Living in Covenant Community, Ministry - Serving Others. [4] The aspect of "Ministry" has been the element of the church's mission under which missions outreach has been subsumed.

The Missions Committee developed policies over time that codified the practices of how the church was to interact with currently supported missionaries, evaluate new missionaries for potential financial support, and conduct short-term missions opportunities. [5] These were developed in order to help maintain consistency, primarily in the application of funds allocated to missionaries and short-term opportunities. While the committee regularly met and prayed for their supported missionaries and even invited as many as were able to be present at the annual church missions conference, much of the activities of the committee centered around communication updates and updates on status of the committee's funds, most of which were allocated to supported missionaries such that only minor changes were made in funding. In addition, the committee would consider occasional requests from individuals for financial support for various short-term opportunities though this was limited. In short, most of these activities focused on management of the relationships with the churches missionaries, missions opportunities, and available funds.

The youth of the church had also had a number of years of successful short-term trips, primarily to Mexico but also to some domestic contexts with high financial needs. However, these trips were abandoned around 2006 in favor of emphasis by the youth on serving local needs in partnership with local non-profits serving residents of the surrounding community in need. At this point in GBC's history, the youth trips were some of the only outreach efforts of the church though there were still a few church members who participated individually in work projects with a handful of the church's supported missionaries.

For all of these updates and requests, the missions policy document was used to govern the appropriate response and criteria for evaluation. However, this policy document had grown and become formalized such that it was 12 pages long, single spaced. In fact, this document was larger and even more formal than policies that applied to the church staff or even the church's by-laws. Much of this document emphasized the type of activities in which both the committee and missionaries should engage (evaluation, communication, educating the congregation) but none of the elements addressed the type and quality of the relationships the church was to foster with the supported missionaries. Instead, the purpose statement included the following list of objectives to be accomplished by the committee as it carried out its duties:

[The committee] "shall perform the following watch care, management and oversight duties, on behalf of the Church:

- Setting goals and priorities for its missionary outreach
- Establishing a comprehensive missions plan
- Praying regularly for its missionaries
- Communicating regularly with its missionaries
- Encouraging others to pray and communicate, likewise

- Educating its congregation about the Church’s mission outreach
- Introducing its supported missionaries and their fields of service
- Managing its financial resources for missionary outreach
- Equipping those individuals considering missionary service
- Evaluating its existing missionary outreach and policies
- Seeking and developing new missionary outreach opportunities”^[6]

In 2010 and early 2011, several different events occurred that began a shift in how the church approached missions and missions opportunities. First, there was a change in senior pastoral leadership in which the new senior pastor began to emphasize the mission of the church, particularly the fourth component of ministry under which community outreach and international missions was a focus. As part of this effort, one of the part-time church staff members and his wife attended the Leadership ConneXion event in January 2011 in Portland, OR. Following that meeting, they met and shared with the senior pastor what they had learned about church supported missions and utilizing short-term teams to galvanize a church around what God was doing around the world. It was also at this Leadership ConneXion event that the concept of supporting versus sending church was presented. This too was shared with the pastor as a useful way to consider the church’s current status as primarily a supporting church that “pays our missionaries to do the work of missions on our behalf” and the desire to change this perspective to instead be one of a “sending church.”

Haiti Connection

The same part-time staff member who attended the Leadership ConneXion event noted above had the prior year been involved in a life-changing event that set the stage for the next phase of the church’s development. He had responded following the devastating earthquake in Port au Prince, Haiti, on January 12, 2010 and was in-country a week or so later. This man had spent several adolescent years in Haiti while his father served as a manufacturing engineer in the 80s. He had then received medical training as a Navy corpsman and was now being trained as a helicopter pilot with the intention of flying helicopters in support of missions efforts in the future. He had been in Haiti for about a week and was intermittently communicating with his family and the church as he was able during that turmoil. Having originally intended to fly to transport supplies, his medical skills were needed more and he began handling patients and doing triage at a makeshift orphanage-turned-clinic. His wife joined him about a week later and the two of them remained in Haiti for several more weeks serving the injured.

During their time there, they became acquainted with a young Haitian man who was translating for them. This man had a dream of coming to the U.S. and being trained as a nurse to return one day to serve the Haitian people. It just so happens that this young man’s father was a pastor and led several churches in the capital city and had trained a number of other church planters throughout the country. The couple expressed their desire to help the pastor’s son to come to the U.S. and began a relationship with their family. It took several months but the couple was able to help the young man visit the U.S. on a tourist visa and he got to know others at GBC, including sharing his vision for his education. Several members of GBC also caught that vision and determined to support his education, he was admitted, and began nursing studies in a Portland college later that year.

Meanwhile, the vision for this young man’s education extended to others at the church hearing about the ministry of his father and the needs of the country. This became fully developed in January 2011 and the idea of a short-term trip to Haiti with a team selected to help “jump start” a shift in missions emphasis for the church was born. This coincided with a greater than normal annual funding carryover and the decision to fund such a trip by the church (including congregational support) led to the development of such a team and a visit by a number of key church leaders to Haiti in mid-2011. Another unique aspect of the initial trip was the potential to connect a different GBC missionary with the Haitian pastor for future short term opportunities with his organization—cross-agency collaboration.

During this time, the senior pastor joined the Missions Committee to talk about the church's philosophy of missions and also consider how to evaluate the effectiveness of the committee's efforts regarding missions. The committee began a process to consider which missionaries the church supported, what kind of relationship they had with the church, and the degree to which their ministry focus was congruent with the church's own stated mission. Many of the current Missions Committee members had served in the capacity for a number of years and significantly supported missions work at GBC in the past or had themselves been involved in missions (several had served on the field as missionaries or were children of missionaries). The committee had a desire to see missions promoted with the rest of the church beyond the few times a year through formal activities including the annual missions conference.

The evaluation process emphasized not only congruence of ministry focus between GBC and the missionary but also considered some tangible aspects of the relationship between the church and the missionary including responsiveness to the church's communication and whether their context allowed GBC to send a team to participate with them on the field. In addition, the committee considered the percentage of funding provided by GBC toward the missionary's total needs as a representation of the church's importance to the missionary's ministry (a higher degree of funding indicating a greater depth of relationship and importance). Many of these evaluative elements had a decidedly relational emphasis that tended to flow from another of the church's aspects of its mission statement—Fellowship – living in covenant community.

The church sponsored several short-term trips over the next few years and even was able to provide resources to further the Haitian pastor's vision to purchase property that could be leveraged as a base of operations from which ministry could be launched to other parts of the country. This has continued such that individuals or teams from GBC have now visited Haiti to work with this pastor eight times since Spring 2011 and the pastor and his wife have visited GBC twice in the same time period. In addition, their son continues his nursing preparation, resides now with a different member of the church (who happened to be a member of the initial short-term team in 2011), and has been brought on as a "missionary-in-training" by GBC; several members of GBC are serving in a mentoring capacity to this young man.

One limitation and indication that this change for GBC was a work in progress was reflected in projects that were initiated in Haiti that either weren't sustainable or were repurposed after a short amount of time. One example was physical improvements done to the pastor's home to enable him to better serve members of the congregation. Some of those improvements weren't used by the pastor's family following work trips and even were reported to have caused resentment from other members of the pastor's extended family and even his congregation. Future trips involved much more communication with the pastor to try to listen to his needs and ask how proposed solutions or ministry opportunities would be perceived by others.

GBC Post-Haiti

Following the initial work in Haiti from 2011-12, GBC experienced a change in pastoral leadership. While this significantly affected the church as a whole, interestingly, the Missions Committee was relatively stable through the changes and even added a few new members, many of whom were present on the initial Haiti trip in 2011. In fact, the committee continued its own development of relationships with supported missionaries and has since scheduled and administered 1-2 short term trips to Haiti or other field contexts every summer since 2011. Additional team leaders have been recruited to lead some of these teams and the committee has also been instrumental in developing a rotating, monthly presentation of the work of supported missionaries before the congregation.

In addition, the committee developed and initiated a review of all supported missionaries based on a list of values that emerged from the church's own mission statement and list of values. The first test of this process when it was determined some of the missionaries who had been supported for a number of years didn't match the qualities the committee was seeking, either lack of communication and reciprocity in the relationship or a difference in ministry focus that didn't provide opportunity for GBC members to participate on the fields with the missionary. After much deliberation and prayer, the committee decided to recommend reallocation of funding to other missionaries who did align more closely with the values. The church board and congregation agreed with the recommended funding changes and they were communicated to the missionaries. While such a decision was difficult, the reality was the funding levels provided by GBC of the missionaries whose support was dropped was much lower than was the financial support of the

missionaries whose values were more congruent with the church. This then allowed the church to reallocate funds to these missionaries and further increase the level of support and relationship with them.

Within this same time frame, the church had two missionaries emerge from within the congregation who were seeking to be sent to the field—one family and one single. In fact, the family was the same couple who had initially established the relationship with the young Haitian man and his father, the Haitian pastor, who had been instrumental in developing a continual relationship with GBC and the Haitian church. This reallocation of funding enabled GBC to fund these missionaries significantly which has provided a further connection between the church and missionaries in the field.

A representation of the shift in perspective by the church has been made from the pulpit several times that “We believe our missionaries are an extension of our church staff,” extending the church’s mission and global outreach into other areas where church members can’t be regularly. Several supported missionaries have commented to church leaders that this statement is reflective of a deepening relationship they feel with the church and is somewhat unique among their supporting churches. This emphasis is still growing among church leaders but has been represented tangibly over the past four years when salary increases provided to church staff have also been represented through equivalent increases in missions support (which the committee then allocates among the current missionaries or any new missionaries to be supported).

Recently, the GBC Missions Committee requested some information from all supported missionaries in order to better understand their context and needs. In response to the question, “In what way might you benefit from individuals or work teams from GBC spending time with you in the field?” the pastor of the Haitian church mentioned above indicated,

. . . it would be greatly appreciated if different faces come to see for themselves the work that we are doing in Haiti. Work teams could help as well with summer camps, training leaders, construction and preaching. I believe this will not only strengthen the trustworthy relationship that has been built between GBC and I but also more work would be done more efficiently. [\[7\]](#)

In response to another question, “What would you change about the way GBC communicates with you?” he answered,

What I would change is the means of communication. I understand it's very easy to send an email but I would love to build a deeper friendship with GBC. For example, once in a while I could do a Skype video with some members just so we could pray for each other or about anything else. It doesn't have to be money related. I guess what I'm trying to say, “I want to be a brother to GBC not just this missionary who is supported by the church.” [\[8\]](#)

Finally, a response to the question, “What would you change about the way GBC supports you beyond financial support?” was as follows:

That means a lot for us when our relationship becomes closer and closer with GBC. GBC realized that our work is the most important task on earth to support us beyond financial support. This question relates to the one above. *I want to add GBC to my family list. I'm more interested in building a deeper relationship in Christ with the church than anything else.* I do have this type of relationship with few of GBC members, but I want to tell GBC that anyone else is always welcome to be a part of the family (emphasis added). [\[9\]](#)

As can be seen, there is still relational growth desired on the part of the Haitian pastor but the reality is much has changed in the past five years. This has even been represented in a shift in local outreach among church members, something that was very limited back in 2010. While still a work in progress as with many churches, the outreach mindset was reflected recently in a sermon by the senior pastor in which he indicated that CB churches have done well teaching theology but can tend to neglect outreach. Both are necessary. A purpose of the church is to help each person [\[10\]](#)

“develop a depth of faith so you can feel confident to share your faith.”

Case Assessment

Certainly not all churches that might be considered “supporting churches” would overtly say they “pay their missionaries to do the work of missions for us.” However, this can be a pragmatic by-product of an approach in which there isn’t the depth of personal relationships between the missionaries and the church. Practically speaking, in GBC’s case prior to 2011 this was occurring since the church wasn’t engaged in local missions and evangelism at that point; the primary outreach mechanism was its supported missionaries (as noted, even the short-term teams had been reduced and had almost stopped completely).

In addition, the perspective of the Missions Committee appears to have devolved into what has been called “managerial missiology.”^[11] While this approach may have emanated from a sincere desire to better accomplish the work of the Great Commission, the tension between efficiency and effectiveness that is often discussed in organizational decision making was displayed in a shift toward efficient methods of operation in favor of achieving outcomes. This could be seen in the very nature of the Missions Committee policies that tended to emphasize specific practices and not the qualities of effective relationships with missionaries.

There was an obvious shift in relational focus by GBC starting with the initial trip to Haiti in 2011 that appears to have been sustained and growing since then. This relational focus has affected not only continued relationships between GBC and the Haitian church but the relationships GBC has with its other supported missionaries. This has also been reflected in the manner in which two new missionaries have been sent from GBC since 2011 and who provided an example to the congregation for the type of relationships the church should attempt to maintain with the rest of its missionaries, something that hadn’t been emphasized in the past.

Another aspect of GBC’s developing perspective was highlighted in the initial trips to Haiti where there was a U.S. centric planning process for both work projects and ministry activities. This too seems to be a natural outgrowth of the managerial missiology framework in which the supporting church can see their solutions as preferred without considering that the receiving church has a much better understand of the ministry context. In future ministry opportunities, this was remedied by active listening that could even be characterized as mutual submission on the part of both churches.

As can be seen through the comments made recently by the Haitian pastor in response to the Missions Committee questionnaire, there is still a desire for a growing familial relationship. The questions the committee is asking of its supported missionaries reflect a qualitative difference in the types of interactions the committee was seeking from missionaries back in 2010. None of the former evaluation mechanisms promoted in the former policy manual had a relational emphasis whereas multiple responses were requested recently that were relationally focused. It appears such a shift in emphasis has been a welcome change for both the Haitian pastor and other missionaries supported by GBC.

Theological and Theoretical Framework

As noted in the introduction, the Apostle Paul considered his work a partnership between himself and the churches who were supporting him in the work of the gospel. Just about every one of Paul’s letters addresses the relational component of the ministry he had with the churches to which he wrote. Paul also writes of the manner in which we as believers are supposed to support one another for our mutual benefit. In Eph 5:21, Paul indicates in his section on the life of the church we are to be “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This statement precedes not only his admonitions for husbands and wives in the following verses but all familial relationships in the following chapter. In fact, this aspect of mutual submission is what is expected to characterize relationships among believers and is modeled in the relationship among the members of the Godhead. As noted in the relational paradigm, “God is” which defines all other reality for us (who we “are”, what we “know”, and how we “do”). That we have been made in his image (Gen 1:26-27) is a declaration that we too should reflect this same relational reality in all of our relationships.

These are just a few examples of Scripture that speak to the relational nature of God and us as human beings and the vital importance for us to be in proper vertical relationship with God and proper horizontal relationships with other believers and other human beings. This has implications for how we approach missions. As noted above, the former approach of GBC was reflective of managerial missiology. Wan addresses the Managerial Missiology Paradigm (MMP) ^[12] and the differences between this approach and that of the “relational paradigm” (reflected as the Diaspora Missiology Paradigm). A key distinction is the MMP seems to emerge from a *functional* approach to accomplishing desired outcomes as opposed to a *relational* approach to gospel proclamation and transformation. Indeed, this functional versus relational approach is similar to what has been addressed in the domain of leadership studies as far back as Douglas McGregor’s development of Theory X and Theory Y or the task versus people approach to management of the mid-20th century. ^[13]

Finally, this case reflects the tendency when operating bound by the MMP for U.S. based churches to be Americentric in function, effectively declaring “we have something to offer you.” The relational paradigm instead would promote a “transnational and global” perspective ^[14] in which there is mutual learning and growth. The former approach has gradually given way to the realization that the U.S. partners must be submissive to their international brothers and sisters who can often minister more effectively in their own contexts. In addition, U.S. partners can learn something about humanity, and often God himself, by taking the posture of “submitting to one another.” This is another implication of the relational paradigm Wan calls “Missions ‘with’ the diaspora” ^[15] as opposed to missions “to” or “beside” those in another context.

Implications for Practice

Church leaders should be aware of the relational paradigm at work in missions relationships with other churches around the world. However, this reality is not only something that should be considered for practice but it actually defines the nature of our relationships within the church itself. Given our tendency (and that of the world around us) to take a functional approach which can devolve into what can a person “do,” we must combat this tendency by emphasizing relationships. As noted in the relational paradigm, a right relationship with God reorients us as human beings to then engage in healthy relationships with others.

The positive outcome seen in this case, however, is that positive relationships with other believers can also help reorient our relationship with God. This was reflected in the impact the Haitian church had on GBC and the reorientation of missions philosophy and, ultimately, God’s plan for the church. In the process, the church became properly oriented to God’s plan and purpose which in turn has enabled the church to minister more effectively to those in need outside the church and more effectively disciple church members.

In the words of organizational theorists, Argyris and Schön, we can find hope by raising before people what are our “theories in use” (ways we actually operate) versus our “espoused theories” (the ways we say we operate), ^[16] presenting how they differ and the need for change to be congruent in our belief and our practice. In doing so, our churches can grow and change to better reflect God’s intended purpose, better serve our brothers and sisters around the world, and more effectively declare the good news to those who need to hear.

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[1] Presented at the Northwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society, April 2, 2016

[2] Some have questioned if this practice is really of greatest benefit and rightly so. Cf. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*, New edition. (Moody Publishers, 2014).

[3] Wan, Enoch. "The Paradigm of 'Relational Realism.'" *Occasional Bulletin* 19, no. 2. Evangelical Missiological Society (2006): 1–4.; Wan, Enoch. "Relational Theology and Relational Missiology." *Occasional Bulletin* 21, no. 1. Evangelical Missiological Society (2007): 1–8.

[4] "Grace Baptist Church - Our Vision and Values." Grace Baptist Church. Accessed March 25, 2016.
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[5] "GBC Missions Policy." Grace Baptist Church Missions Committee, September 15, 2007.

[6] "GBC Missions Policy." Grace Baptist Church Missions Committee, September 15, 2007, 1.

[7] Personal communication, February 17, 2016.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Adam Fitch, "The Christians" (presented at the Worship Service, Grace Baptist Church, March 13, 2016).

[11] Samuel Escobar, "Managerial Missiology," in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie, Juan F. Martinez, and Simon Chan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 216–218.

[12] See chapter 7 of Enoch Wan, "Managerial Missiology - The Popular Paradigm," in *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies - USA, 2012), 111–121.

[13] Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).

[14] Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies - USA, 2012), 128.

[15] Wan, *Diaspora Missiology*, 133.

[16] Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).