

A Comparison of Methods Used to Identify and Select Missionaries

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From the early history of our world, God has called people to specific tasks. He has called some to lead His people, others to make His will known and for many others, tasks of importance. In the majority of the cases which are mentioned in the Bible, God has exercised His divine will and prerogative and called His servants directly.

God called Noah to the task of making preparations to preserve a remnant of the creation while He fulfilled His plan to wipe mankind and the other creatures from the face of the earth because He was grieved that He had made them (Gen. 6:7-13). Noah was also called to preach righteousness so that in spite of the destruction which was to come upon God's creation some might still be saved eternally (2 Pet. 2:5).

Abraham was called directly by God to be the father of His chosen people from whom He would bring the promised Seed of Woman who would save the world from its sin.

God called Moses and also his brother Aaron to rescue Israel from bondage in Egypt, to bring her to the land that the Lord had promised to give her, to teach her His will and to train the people to worship the one true God. There are many other examples in the Old Testament of people whom God selected and called to special tasks. There were the prophets, the priests, the judges, the kings and others whom God called into His service.

In the New Testament we also note that God called his messengers and workmen. He sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Messiah. The Lord Himself called His disciples, some from their fishing and another from his tax collecting. He then prepared them to be His messengers and sent them on a blessed mission which we and many others are still endeavoring to fulfill.

In the history of the development of the infant Church, St. Luke mentions several occasions in which God called men to special tasks, not by means of a direct calling, but through the church of that day. He mentions the replacement of Judas, the disciple who had fallen. This action was initiated by Peter who recognized that God had prophesied that one would fall and had also indicated that a replacement should be made (Psalm 69:5 & 109:8). Peter urged the brethren, who numbered about 120 at that time, to take action to make the replacement. He suggested that the selection should be made with certain considerations well in mind. He specified that the replacement should be one of the men of their number, one who had been with them from the time of the Lord's baptism until His ascension. The candidates who were to be considered for the replacement had to have these qualifications so that he might be a witness to the Lord's resurrection even as they were His witnesses. Two candidates with the desired qualifications were selected. One was Joseph called Barsabbas and also known as Justus. The other was Matthias. Then after they prayed to the Lord for guidance and revelation they drew lots and the lot fell on Matthias. He was then inducted into the apostolic office.

When a special need arose and help was needed for the apostles, the church again sought qualified people and called them to the task. This time there was need to care for the widows of the congregation. Again there were certain qualifications which were considered essential for those who were to be considered for this task or this office. We are told that they looked to their own people, that is to the believers. They also looked for those who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. When the selection was made the Seven were brought to the Apostles who installed them into their new office. While it is true that they were called chiefly to care for the widows, their activities also included the preaching of the Word as we can see from the activities of Stephen.

But none of these examples really touch directly on the matter which we are to consider in this presentation and in our conference, that of identifying and selecting people for mission work overseas. Mission programs had not been developed and Mission Committees and Boards had not yet been invented. Yet the New Testament is not completely silent on this matter. For that matter the Old Testament isn't either. There was the man named Jonah whom the Lord called into "foreign missions" even though he was not sent overseas. He was

called and sent to Nineveh, a wicked Assyrian metropolis which was some 500 miles from his home town, Gath, which was located west of the Sea of Galilee.

Another name which comes to mind immediately is that of Saul of Tarsus whom the Lord called not only into apostleship, but to be the Lord's chosen instrument to carry His name before the Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel (Acts 9:15) We also think of Barnabas, the son of encouragement, who was sent to Antioch by the church in Jerusalem when the news came that the Good News was spreading there (Acts 11:22). Later on he was called into a special overseas ministry together with St. Paul. Together they went to Cyprus, to Asia Minor and back again.

There were others who were sent to the work either directly through an immediate call from God or by means of a mediate call through the Christian Church. In a study of these calls, we will come to see that the Scriptures do not lay down any specific process for identification and calling of missionaries. God has specified that those called to the ministry, be it at home or overseas, be it in a mission or established congregation, should have certain qualifications, but He has not told us just how men should be selected for specific calls or assignments. To a certain extent, we are on our own as far as the actual calling process together with its preliminary studies is concerned. We would do well to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit and use our sanctified common sense in establishing a fitting procedure, always keeping in mind that those whom we seek to identify and send are being sent to do the Lord's work.

It would be less than honest to say that any particular way is the one "God prescribed" method which should be used by all who are seeking to fulfill the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations and to bear witness to him in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and unto the ends of the earth. The correct way would be to seek a process in accord with the principles revealed in the Word of God and which in our estimation is efficient and productive in relation to the work which we hope to accomplish in the various areas through the calls and positions that we want to fill. Thus there can be a number of procedures which could be considered correct. This would be all the more reason for us to examine the activities of others as well as our own with the hope that we may learn something to improve our own process. Thus we propose to examine the processes of a number of other groups to see what they are doing and try to understand why they act as they do. Perhaps there will be something that we can accept or modify and then use in our own procedures to make our activity more efficient and productive.

In order to bring something authoritative to you I asked a number of groups who are engaged in mission work to send me information or to answer a questionnaire which I had prepared. The time was short and I had to depend on the good will and the ability to respond in time to my request with the result that I had less material to work with for this assignment than I had hoped for. Nevertheless, I think we have sufficient for our purpose.

General Observations

In a general way we can say that each group for which I have information does have and does follow an established process which it has developed to identify and select those workers whom they consider qualified for the special task of missionary work. Each group has a process which seems to work for them, even though no two are just the same.

One of the main differences which I noticed is that some of the groups worked with volunteers and the others sought their workers from among those who are already an active part of their clergy or are preparing for that work.

It seems safe to say that some groups expect the initiative to be shown by the party who is interested in missionary service. Such a person would make his feelings and desires known to those who are responsible for selecting and sending people into the mission fields of their organization. And even though the initial step is expected to be taken by the party interested in serving, it is not expected that such a desire or initiative would be self-generated, or would develop and manifest itself without some kind of encouragement by those responsible for the mission program of their group. The responsible people make a conscious and concerted effort to stimulate and cultivate and increase mission awareness, interest and the desire to serve. They seek to develop

and heighten interest in different ways. They make use of literature, special courses offered in their schools, special programs presented in their congregations and missionaries are invited to appear and speak about missions, all this with the aim and goal of getting the good word out among their own people and, through them to the ends of the earth. Invitations are extended and those who are interested are encouraged to volunteer or make their feelings known.

All of the groups had, by one means or another, developed a set of qualifications which they considered to be essential in their workers and which was used in identifying and selecting those who would be considered for missionary activities overseas. These qualifications are sometimes publicly stated in handbooks or similar documents or simply in the possession of those who take an active part in the identification and selection process.

Additional information or confirmation of information supplied by the volunteer is sought from various sources. The candidate sometimes is asked to fill out an in-depth questionnaire, other times asked to supply an autobiography. Personal consultations are held and contact is made with the references which are supplied by the applicant. As the candidate qualifies in one way or another he moves on step by step in the process to an approved status and finally being sent to service overseas. In most cases the matter of physical and emotional health is considered. Age, academic preparation, marital status, size of family experience and personality are also considered.

Even though it is not always stated in just so many words, those who are responsible for the identification and selection of candidates for the mission fields are concerned that the process benefit the Kingdom, their own program as well as the missionary himself.

Group A

The process used by Group A consists of the following steps which can lead to appointment:

1. The interested party is asked to make contact with the director of personnel in the national headquarters and state his desire to be considered for missionary service overseas.
2. A preliminary application blank will be furnished the applicant for completion and return.
3. If all the responses on the preliminary application blank are considered to be satisfactory and show promise, the *precandidate* will be asked to complete a doctrinal questionnaire and sign the Formal Agreement for Overseas Service and the Statement of Faith.
4. After reports are received on medical and psychological tests the director of personnel will arrange for the candidate to be interviewed by himself and staff members of Overseas Ministries. (This interview could lead to *accredited candidate* status.)
5. If all things are then in order, the sending body will decide whether the candidate will be accredited for overseas service or not.

In summary, the steps and classifications are as follows:

1. **Precandidate** – This status is designed to establish a working relationship between Group A and the prospective candidate who may be a college student, a graduate student or a career person who is seriously considering overseas service.

2. **Accredited Candidate** – This status designates those who have passed the initial interview, are in at least their senior year of college, have both health and psychological clearance, but have not yet completed their postgraduate work or home service for two years.
3. **Eligible for Appointment** – This status indicates that the accredited candidate has completed the two years of service at home and is in his postgraduate studies or he has finished his academic studies and is about to complete his two years of service at home.

Appointment to service is made by the Board of Managers of the Division of Overseas Ministries upon recommendation of the President.

Underlying the process there are certain stated qualifications which are considered both desirable and essential. Among those qualifications we find the following:

- A. The applicant must have been genuinely converted and possess a vital religious experience. He should give evidence that his life is wholly consecrated to God.
- B. He must be ready and willing to count the cost of service and be prepared for the hardships, both physical and emotional which missionary service will require. He must have a firm trust in the Lord and that He will provide.
- C. The applicant must be in fullest accord with the formal Statement of Faith.
- D. He must possess a knowledge of the Bible and having a firm grasp of divine Truth, must be able to impart it to others,
- E. He must be familiar with the truth for which the sending body stands and for this reason it is desirable that he be a graduate from one of the group's recognized and approved schools of theology. (Graduates from other schools may be appointed if approved in all other respects.) Where the candidate is married, wherever possible it is desired that the wife have an academic degree and the equivalent of at least 30 hours of biblical or other mission related studies.
- F. Each candidate should be a master workman in the divine art of soulwinning.
- G. Normally a new missionary is not appointed to regular service overseas after he is 32 years old. If specialized work is required, appointments can be made up to 35. Families should have no more than two children and if the wife should become pregnant between the appointment and the actual leaving on assignment it could be canceled.
- H. Where language studies and proficiency is required, the appointment is not considered permanent until satisfactory knowledge and ability is demonstrated in the language.

Group B

Group B has a similar process.

1. The interested person or the prospective candidate is asked to write to the Board for Foreign Missions giving basic information as to age, educational background and a brief statement regarding missionary service.
2. If the applicant has finished college or has definitely decided on missionary service he is requested to obtain information forms.
3. Interested parties can contact the personnel secretaries as they make regular visits to schools, colleges of Group B and to the area where this group is at work. The purpose of these visits is to give advice and assistance to those who are contemplating mission service. Sometimes missionaries are present who will discuss needs and opportunities in the countries where they are serving. (Up to this point neither the Board nor the candidate is committed in any way.)
4. If the party is still interested at this point he is requested to send in preliminary health forms and then a life history. (The life history required is rather complete. An outline is furnished which indicates the items that should be included in it. It is indicated that this should cover 16 to 22 pages and not more than 25. In addition, the applicant is asked to furnish a thumbnail sketch of his life indicating in a sentence or two the most important events in each year of his life. These documents are not requested only for data but especially to gain insight into the way a person feels and responds to certain situations. They are also used by the doctor making the psychiatric evaluation.)
5. If on the basis of the information received up to this point the candidate is considered to be desirable and qualified, he is invited to a regional group meeting with other interested people for interviews with staff members of the personnel department. (The instructions state that the interview is the heart of the appointment process.)
6. Final applications and twenty-five references are requested as well as completion of the final doctrinal form. References are then contacted with questionnaires.
7. A final review of the application materials will be made by the Mission Personnel Committee of the Foreign Mission Board with an eye to appointment about eight months in the future. If the applicant is accepted he is informed and is invited to come before the Board for his testimony and to receive his appointment. The first term is considered as probationary and during the last year of the term the Mission Secretary is in consultation with the mission to determine if the missionary will be invited back. The Secretary will communicate the decision to the missionary and the mission.

General Qualifications

- A. The Missionary Candidate needs to give evidence of a personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior, a commitment to share His love with others and possess a sense of God's leadership. He must also have a meaningful and active membership in a church of the sending body.
- B. The candidate must be a natural-born citizen of the United States between the ages of twenty four and thirty nine. (Where husband and wife are to be considered, both must qualify and the children must be under thirteen years of age.)
- C. Candidates and children should be in good physical and emotional health.
- D. A bachelor's degree from an accredited college plus appropriate seminary and professional training in the field of service he expects to enter (Wives are encouraged to have college degrees and must have sixty hours of college or seminary work to qualify.) The candidate should have two years of home service in the type of work for which he seeks appointment.

Group C

This group is one of the two which work with the members of its own church body. The process used is quite detailed and a little background will be helpful to understand how the process was developed so that we might more fully understand how it works. (The process was developed originally for use of American Missions, but it is used for other departments of Group C. We are assuming that it is used also in the program of overseas missions.)

In 1972, a career development center was contacted to explore the possibility of developing a process which could differentiate between effective and less effective missionary pastors. The career development center was asked to develop instruments and a process which would help those who were responsible for mission work to be able to recognize and identify those who would be effective pastors. In addition a biographical form was to be developed which would be used in this process. In short, Group C was seeking to develop a process which would shorten their odds in their attempts to identify those who would prove to be effective mission pastors.

A theoretical model was set up and a set of components was set up which it was believed would indicate or identify those who were either effective or less effective. The components were centered around "managerial ability" and the "ability to get things done." Standardized tests, designed to measure these particular components were used.

A structured interview was developed which was designed to help evaluate candidates and a rating scale was devised so that the responses to set questions would be meaningful in the light of indicating the likelihood of effectiveness or less effectiveness.

A sample year was taken which provided a group of men with six years of experience. The supervisors were asked to indicate which qualities or qualifications were found in the effective or the less effective worker. It was felt that the period of six years would help to make the reactions reliable.

The results of the study showed that there were 14 items on the rating scale filled out by the supervisors that showed a high statistical predictive power. There were eight significant interview items that showed a significant power to predict. It was noted that the most significant items were clustered around a "can do" task oriented focus.

Another result of the study was the feeling that a trained interviewer could rate a candidate accurately in those things which were deemed important effectiveness as a mission pastor in the space of about an hour and a

half. Since this was the purpose of the original research, it was felt that the process could increase significantly the number of effective pastors called to that special ministry. This process has been in use since 1975 and is used in the following way:

1. A biographical form is filled out by the person interested in or being considered for mission service. There are the usual standard questions that deal with age, marital status, name etc., but the form seeks to go beyond that and get inside the person. A history of education, both past and continuing is requested, as well as employment history, special needs of the candidate or the family; any area of specialization; geographical areas where the candidate has lived and worked and where he would like to live and work; an evaluation of how he sees himself in a list of roles and functions (general practitioner, preacher, scholar, evangelist, liturgist, counselor, administrator, social reformer, teacher). A career summary and evaluation of skills is requested and finally an evaluation of lifestyle or personality and work habits and preferences scaled on suggested categories.

An accompanying sheet indicates the meaning of the information to the person making the evaluation. In the educational history the major areas of study are meaningful, so is the continuity or lack of it in the educational process. Other meaningful items were: Does he stay for a long or short period of time at his work? Which skills have been or are being developed? Do the roles and functions which he prefers fit with the position you are seeking to fill. The personality and lifestyle section was considered very meaningful since two slots indicated good prospects and another two would indicate almost the opposite.

2. If the information on the biographical form is promising, the next step is the structured interview. The structured interview is a set of 17 set questions. This form gives the interviewer a chance to give full attention to the answers and reactions of the candidate. He is not distracted by thinking of the next question which he will want to ask. It also gives him a chance to consider the answer and arrive at a score for each one. Again there is a method of rating the responses. In addition, the structured interview will, in part, indicate the direction of the unstructured interview which is to follow.
3. In the unstructured interview the interviewer can take up things which came up in the previous one, but which could not be followed up at that time. It also affords an opportunity to touch on things which are considered important for an evaluation which were not included in the limited number of questions in the structured interview. Value questions are used to get at the person's value and philosophic constructs which are important to the division's work. The unstructured interview will, of course, be different each time, but some sample questions are given to indicate which concerns might be explored. Some of those suggested are: concern for the poor, those preferring unconventional lifestyles, the oppressed, the handicapped; concern for social justice and human welfare, for the non-Lutheran community; concern for changes in the light of social needs. These are perhaps more directed to a state-side ministry, but in interviewing someone for overseas, other concerns would be explored.

These are the steps which are followed by Group C in the process of seeking out and selecting those people who are likely to be effective in mission work. It is supposed that once this has been done, the regular process of calling a particular person to a particular position would take place

Group D

The established process now in use in Group D somewhat revolves around a Personnel Secretary on the staff for the Board of Missions. He and his staff are chiefly responsible for the recruitment and selection of missionary people. The sources for likely candidates are: 1. Seminary seniors. 2. Active pastors.

The Personnel Secretary seeks to make contact with the seminary students (not only seniors) by making regular visits to the seminaries at least twice a year. Thus over a period of several years he feels that he is able to become quite well acquainted with the students. On these periodic visits the Mission Secretary speaks at mission rallies on the campus and meets with all interested students. Seminary students who develop an interest in missions usually let this be known, or it becomes known to the faculty advisors, vicarage supervisors, placement officers and representatives from the Board for Missions who visit the seminary campuses from time to time. This information is then passed on to the Personnel Secretary and his department.

By the fall of the year the Personnel Dept. begins to look seriously at interested candidates to fill positions which have been requested by partner churches or mission fields and which appear to be funded for the coming year. The seniors who are seriously interested are then provided with biographical information forms which are completed and returned to the Personnel Dept. An evaluation is requested from the vicarage supervisor and from the seminary Placement Officer.

In March of each year the seniors who appear to be best qualified are interviewed. (If they are married, this meeting would include the wife also.) Those who seem most likely qualified are requested to proceed with the pre-service physical and psychiatric interviews.

When the services of an experienced pastor is requested or required the first step is to search the prospect file. This file is developed from a number of sources. It would include the names of seminary graduates who had expressed an interest in missions in the seminary or who were considered for mission work at that time but who for one reason or another did not go overseas immediately after graduation. There would also be names received through contact with district presidents and district mission executives.

The Personnel Secretary for the Board for Missions is chiefly responsible for the recruitment and selection of the prospective candidates for overseas missions, but the actual selection is done by other responsible people. In the case of seminary graduates, Board-for-Missions-approved calls are submitted to the Board of Assignments. The board then will select candidates from among those who have been screened and deemed qualified for overseas assignments in consultation with the institutional placement officers. In the case of an active or experienced pastor, the Board for Missions formally acts upon a recommendation to issue a call to a given person. Those who are considered for these calls have generally been screened and approved and recommended for a call. When a church or a mission field submits a position request and a description as to the kind of person needed for the particular assignment, the Personnel Dept. recruits, screens and selects accordingly. A list of recommended candidates is developed for consideration in calling. Sometimes the profiles of prospective candidates are shared with the field authority for their reaction and input. Then when a slate of candidates has been agreed upon, the staff of the Board for Missions will draw up a recommendation to the Board as to which candidate should be seriously considered for the actual call.

In recruitment as well as in the training program, Group D has always endeavored to maintain a standard of excellence and a proper balance between pious zeal and the Scriptural requirement of aptitude and capacity for performing the primary tasks expected of the church's professional workers.

Some of the qualifications which are vital to and included in the screening and selection process for candidates are as follows.

By the time a student is ready for graduation there should be adequate evidence of Christian commitment, aptitude for the work, professional and technical competence (with a capacity and willingness for continued growth), good physical health and emotional stability and family solidarity. These qualifications would be necessary for a candidate to be assigned to any pastoral position, and since it is recognized that there are special conditions on the mission field, it is felt that a special set of criteria is needed for those being considered for overseas service.

- A. There should be proper motivation. It is stated that if there is any evidence that a prospective candidate has any ulterior motive for seeking overseas service in place of firm, Christian commitment under the Great Commission, it would exclude such a person from further consideration.
- B. A person should be flexible, adaptable, creative and have capacity for growth.
- C. He should have ability to relate to people, that is being sensitive, appreciative and understanding the sense of values of others, to be able to listen and dialogue meaningfully and to be ready to serve

Of a more specific nature and more closely related to conditions on mission fields it is stated that they are looking for candidates who can:

1. Cope and live with the unpredictable or who have an evident capacity to develop such an ability.
2. Tolerate isolation and function well in it, live under scrutiny.
3. Work together in a team situation where the relationships are intimate, intense and demanding and where lines of authority are clearly set, recognized and respected.
4. Cope with homesickness, strange things like food, customs etc. and an ability to practice patience.
5. Be realistic and a real person, one who is not ashamed of his identity in Christ, sincere about his own set of values under the Gospel, one who strives to add dimension to his personality in Christ, and strives to add dimension by adopting an adjusted way of life in community with those around him (beginning in the home).

It is recognized that the use of a detailed catalog or checklist of qualifications for missionary service is not without hazard. It is recognized at best as only a partial measure of certain aspects of the whole person who in Christ is a new creature but yet plagued with a variety of weaknesses and shortcomings. And since Christian growth is a lifelong effort under God's grace to reach maturity in Christ, it is felt that those who are to teach and lead should be well on that way.

Selection of properly qualified candidates for missionary service is really a team operation. Each person on that team has an important contribution to make as resource and consultant. Finally it is the terminal school placement officer who in turn with the Placement Committee recommends specific names for specific calls to be approved by the Board of Assignments. The team is:

1. The Placement Officer of each terminal school
2. The Medical examiner
3. The psychiatrist/psychologist interviewer
4. The Medical Advisor of the Board for Missions
5. Area Secretaries of the Board for Missions
6. Secretaries for Personnel for the Board for Missions.

The actual process of calling is very much like ours. The candidates are assigned and Pastors are called.

Now that we have heard how other groups seek to identify and select their mission workers it is my hope that by discussion and committee action we will be able to make some suggestions that would improve our own process to do the same. We need not fear to suggest changes which we feel will improve our process since, as we stated, there is no one God-appointed way. The Scriptural injunctions which would seem to apply are: We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work (John 9:4), and all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).