

# **The Principles for Nomination and Calling of World Missionaries**

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Some years ago an older woman with a kind and perceptive Christian outlook commented to her pastor on the fine relationship which existed between himself and his congregation, He replied that this was not so much due to any particular qualities which he had or which the congregation possessed, but that it resulted from the fact that the Lord had brought together a pastor and a congregation who were particularly well suited to each other. It was something like the fine fit which we sometimes find between hand and glove. The fact that the fit is there does not mean that either hand or glove are better or more beautiful than others, They just happen to fit one another especially well. When that kind of fit occurs in the ministry of the church, and it occurs remarkably often when we consider that the saints involved still carry about with themselves their sinful flesh, the result is a blessing to all concerned.

The topic assigned for this study concerns itself with finding that kind of fit in our world mission fields. Our overall concern on this first day of our conference has to do with the selection of the man who with his family is to be our Lord's and our church's representative in the world mission field. Our first essay has defined the kind of man we are looking for. We now come to the very practical question, "How do we as a church go about selecting and calling the missionaries we send out into our world mission fields?" It is appropriate that in our second essay we should examine

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There are various angles from which we could view the topic which is before us. It would seem useful for our purposes here this afternoon to gather our thoughts under two headings—

1. Knowing what is needed.
2. Exercising care in the calling process.

### **1.**

In many respects our topic is meant more for those who are members of executive committees and of the Board for World Missions than for those who are serving out in the mission field. At the same time it is good that together we should have the opportunity to consider matters which so vitally touch the lives of all of us.

Our previous essayist has already pointed out that living and working in a foreign environment places certain demands onto a person which are not present or which are not nearly as pressing in a stateside ministry. Often enough these demands or pressures are not fully evident to the casual visitor. Even executive committee members can come and go and even make repeated visits without ever really getting to know or to feel what it means to serve in a foreign field. We say this not to imply any fault or failing on the part of those who come to visit. Rather, it is a fact of life which our Board for World Missions committees need to keep in mind as they evaluate the needs in this or that world mission field.

I have often wished that there could be some way in which executive committee members, perhaps one at a time and possibly best when they are first elected to office could spend four or six weeks in the mission field, living in with some of our mission families, accompanying the missionary on his daily rounds, sharing his joys and feeling of the doubts and disappointments, which come all too easily and more often than one would like, helping with looking for needed supplies, giving a hand at repairing an appliance which has ceased to function, and trying to communicate with someone whose tongue and whose way of thinking is strange and different.

Lacking such experience it is doubly important that we make a real effort to understand what we are asking of a man and his family when we ask them to represent us in a world mission field. In other words, we need to recognize first of all that *foreign service places unusual demands both on the missionary and on his family*.

It follows then that in selecting men to serve in the world mission field, we need to look for persons who are eminently qualified for such service. This is the pattern which was established already in the early church. Paul and Barnabas were two of the five leading prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch and yet it was these two whom the Holy Ghost selected for the first missionary thrust into Cyprus and into Asia Minor. Among those chosen to assist Paul and Barnabas in their missionary work were two men whom the Holy Spirit later on chose to be writers of portions of the New Testament, Luke and John Mark.

I believe it is correct to say that our executive committees have consciously been reaching out for men who have demonstrated a full measure of the qualities and abilities which are needed in our world mission fields. There has been a readiness, particularly in more recent years, to call such men even though they already were serving in responsible and demanding positions in the church. By and large I believe that both on our Board for World Missions and in our Synod at large we have come to recognize that *key personnel needs to be called to serve in our world mission fields*.

The qualifications we need to look for in calling world missionaries have been adequately outlined for us by our previous essayist. I particularly appreciate his statement that we need first of all to turn to the Lord for guidance as we determine what to look for in the man who is to be called into a distant mission field. Basically the qualifications are the same as those which the Lord sets for the office of the ministry everywhere in his church. Each of these requirements, however, takes on added importance when a man is asked to serve in a field in which to an unusual degree he needs to work in close harmony with his fellow missionaries and where more so than in any stateside ministry his life is under scrutiny by those he has come to serve.

A thorough periodic review of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and of Titus 1:6-10 would be good preparation for all who are involved in the nomination and calling process. Our Board for World Missions Handbook states it well when it says, "Work in a distant field requires all of the qualifications stated in Holy Scripture in highest measure" (Primary Objectives, Section 9). In other words, *the scriptural requirements for the ministry are basic for service in the world mission field*.

It is not my purpose at this point to review what has been well stated by the previous essayist. However, there are several of the qualifications in 1 Timothy and in Titus which are particularly important and have special application in the mission field. At the risk of seeming to regard other qualifications as being less important or necessary, I would like to call attention particularly to two.

We recognize that everyone in the public ministry needs to be "apt to teach." We need also to recognize that this qualification must be present to an unusual degree in one who is to serve in an overseas mission field. A world missionary needs to have both the willingness and the ability to learn a new language. He needs also to have the ability to present complex truths in simple, clear and unambiguous terms. He is there to bring the most important message and the most precious truth in all the world, it is important that he be able to do so in a way his hearers will be able to understand. I suppose one could say that what we are looking for is something of a combination of a seminary professor and a good first grade teacher. This gift is not given to all in the same measure. Yet it needs to be high on the list when looking for world missionaries.

Another quality which takes on a special importance in the world mission field is that of being able to work in close harmony with others, both fellow missionaries and nationals. It is perhaps a combination of what Paul includes under "sober...patient...not self-willed...not being lifted up with pride." A man who is strong-willed and has to "do his own thing" is a disaster in a world mission field. The ideal is to have a mission team which, though made up of separate and independent individuals, can think like one man in developing its program and carrying out its work. Our Board for World Missions Handbook (IV-7-K,2) calls attention to the need for "compatibility to serve with and under others, particularly in an isolated situation." Our previous essayist has given us a very practical guide by stating, "A good rule of thumb might be that if a man wouldn't be considered for a dual pastorate in the U.S., he certainly should not be considered for a mission call."

Again, I do not wish to imply that other qualifications are less important. Yet, if we have trouble with these two, then we are in trouble indeed. Perhaps I would come closest to what I would really like to say if I were to point out that in considering nominations for a call into the world mission field we need to look for those who have a good balance of the gifts which the Word of God designates as being essential in those who are to do the work of the holy ministry.

There are other matters as well concerning which the Scripture does not speak directly, but concerning which the Lord surely expects us to use the good judgment and common sense which He has given us. These, too, have been well outlined in the previous essay. The basic factors are recognized in the Board for World Missions Handbook in the following statement.

It is the purpose of the Board for World Missions in staffing our mission fields to consider the importance of the physical and emotional condition of the missionary, his wife and family.

Work in a distant field requires all of the qualifications stated in Holy Scriptures for the office of the holy ministry in highest measure. Solitary existence under trying, foreign conditions without the opportunity of brotherly counsel and correction demand people of most steady character and emotional balance, both in the missionary as well as his wife and family. Without infringement upon the sanctity of the Call, the Board for World Missions will, therefore, exercise caution in calling men, establishing as far as is humanly possible that they are physically and emotionally qualified for the work.

It stands to reason that persons facing extraordinary problems, related to health, emotional stability, education of children, difficult family situations and the like should not be subjected to the additional pressures of overseas living. Ours as Board for World Missions executive committees is the difficult task of recognizing when a pastor and his family already may be near the edge of their ability to cope with personal and family problems and then to refrain from confronting them with a world mission call.

We do not need supermen or superfamilies in our world mission fields, but we do need to know that there are some to whom the Lord has given a larger measure of the qualities needed to serve in the world mission field just as He has fitted some in a special way to meet unusually demanding situations right here in the States.

It is up to us to know what these qualities are and to learn to recognize them in the persons we are considering for the unique position of world missionary.

## 2.

It follows then that we need to exercise due care in the calling process.

The very nature of the calling process ought to impress on all concerned the need for such care. It is a humbling fact that the Lord is able to use fallible human beings to select and call those whom He has chosen to serve in the office of the ministry and that when all has been said and done we are able to say that it is God Himself who has extended the Call.

It is with this in mind that the church does exercise great care in carrying out the calling process. When there is a stateside pastoral vacancy, the congregation informs the District President and looks to him for a list of candidates from which it can call. Only one who has ever held the District President's office can know how much prayer, how many hours of consideration and how much consultation with others goes into setting up a call list. When the call meeting is held, either the District President or his direct representative, one of the vice-presidents or a circuit visitor, is present. The meeting itself is a solemn occasion, conducted with the prayer that the Lord would make His choice of man clear and that His will be done.

In calling a world missionary, all this is done, and more. The Board for World Missions Handbook makes the following provisions.

--The Calling and placement of missionaries and other workers in the world mission fields shall be vested in the Executive Committees. This shall be done by secret ballot from a slate of candidates set up for the Call meeting.

--The candidates named by the District Presidents and other members of the Synod shall be evaluated as to their physical and psychological fitness to serve in a foreign mission field, to wit: as to the adaptability of themselves, their wives, and their families to conditions in the foreign field where they are to serve, as to their soundness in Lutheran doctrine and practice, and as to their compatibility to serve with and under others, especially in an isolated situation.

--It is recommended that the Executive Secretary and/or a member of the Praesidium be present at the Call meetings.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty, even for a District President, is that of getting accurate, up-to-date information particularly in those matters which pertain to health and special family situations. There are no easy answers. We have no highly sophisticated computer bank which will spit out detailed information on our pastors' work habits and on their personal and family characteristics, and I don't suppose we ever will or should have. However, there do have to be ways of finding those who are particularly well suited for overseas service and of refraining from calling those who are not.

One way to go is to obtain and to keep updated a list of persons who would be suitable candidates for a world mission call. At a Synod-wide meeting of circuit visitors last fall I suggested that once a year each district visitors' conference would spend an hour or so in preparing and updating such a list. Each district would forward its list to the two or three district presidents who are called on to supply call lists to our Board for World Missions executive committees. It is even possible that the Executive Secretary could from time to time be invited to attend such circuit visitors' meetings to provide additional input. This would surely be in line with the provision in his call that he is to "define the qualifications of workers to be called into the World Mission fields, including the qualifications already incorporated in the *Handbook for World Missions* and *The Underlying Principles and Primary Objectives of the Board for World Missions*.

Our Synod's Conference of Presidents has also studied the matter of securing valid information concerning men being considered for service as a world missionary. A Conference of Presidents' resolution adopted October 9-10, 1978, recognizes among other things

1. That the demands of foreign mission work require special and unique talents on the part of both the missionary and his family.
2. That it is desirable to have more information than is at times readily available to the District President.
3. That in the absence of adequate information calls have at times been extended to men whose family circumstances have been incompatible with a particular field of labor.

In light of the foregoing, the Conference of Presidents resolved that the Executive Secretary of the Board for World Missions should obtain additional family information from the district presidents concerning the men whose names have been submitted for foreign mission work by the responsible district president, the implication being that such further information should be given to the executive committee which is calling. It is also desirable that the Executive Secretary be present in the call meeting.

There is, of course, no system which will give us all the answers. The information we are able to gather will at best be less than would be desirable. Our evaluation of the information we have, careful and considered though it be, may still be flawed. I have an idea that we would very possibly have ruled out Paul because of his thorn in the flesh. Even Paul and Barnabas chose a companion for their first world mission venture who did not work out—at least not on that first trip. Yet here also, as in so many aspects of kingdom work, the Lord has His way, and He is able even to use our faults and failures to accomplish His work. When, in spite of the best that an executive committee could do with the best of help and advice which it could receive a missionary does not

work out, let us remember that the Lord is still in control and that His evaluation of success does not always coincide with ours.

Not that this can or ever dare become an excuse for laxness on our part in selecting and calling a missionary or any other worker in His kingdom. The responsibility which rests on us is very clear. In prayer and in all humility we need to exercise care in the calling process.

Having done this, let us know that the Lord will use what we have done to bring great blessing to many.