

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

by

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MOODY PRESS CHICAGO

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

A CHURCH MISSIONARY PROGRAM (Continued)

II. Accurate and up-to-date information

Many things we mentioned for stirring up interest serve just as well to keep up that interest. But here we want to add several items more.

1. Bulletin board

In many active missionary churches you will find a special missionary bulletin board. It has a variety of uses. Pictures and letters from the fields sometimes appear on it. Sometimes it carries special announcements of missionary meetings or a copy of the Church missionary budget. It is a good place to advertise a new missionary book. It all depends on the alertness of the one in charge. Perhaps we don't need to add that it loses its value if you don't keep it up.

If the Church has missionaries of its own, it needs to keep them before the people. "Out of sight, out of mind" applies here. The missionary is gone for three to seven years at a stretch. Meantime the Church membership is changing. Perhaps a new pastor comes. And even those who do remember the missionary find their recollections somewhat vague. Whether on the bulletin board or in some other prominent spot, each missionary's picture should find a permanent place. With it should be his name and postal address.

2. Map

Some people find maps very dull. But that is either because they haven't learned to read them or because they haven't much interest in what the map shows. Maps are like pictures. They try to help us visualize what an area looks like if we could see it all at once. Primitive people often have trouble trying to "see" a picture. Just so, those who are not used to maps have to learn to read them and "see" what they picture. But most Americans can read a map that is not too detailed. In fact, if they are at all interested in a place they like to get a general idea of where it is. That's why newspapers so often print small outline maps with news items from abroad. It helps to locate them.

Just so, the Church should help its people to locate their missionaries or mission fields. It doesn't take a detailed map. The simpler the better for most people. But a general map on which you can make the place you are interested in stand out is a real help. Put it where they can see it.

3. Missionary letters

The most up-to-date news from the mission fields comes through missionary letters. Of course such news comes in small bits. And it isn't always important. Most missionaries write about their own station and work and don't give the broad view. They leave that to others. But it's from these bits of news that you can put the whole picture together.

If the Church is helping support a missionary on the field, it will usually hear from him with fair regularity. He usually acknowledges its gifts. Here is where churches often make a mistake. The letter sometimes gets no farther than the pastor or the treasurer to whom it is addressed. No one else sees it, unless it be the Women's Missionary Society. No one thinks of answering it. Money was sent; a letter comes in acknowledgment; and that's that.

But that shouldn't be all. The money was from the Church, so the Church should see the letter - at least those parts which interest it. Here's where the missionary bulletin board comes in handy. Post the letters there where anyone who wants may read them.

And go a step farther. Answer the letters. There are pastors at home who have never taken the time to write a letter to their missionary. They hear from him. In fact they would think him very remiss if he didn't write. But they are "just too busy" to answer. We're not going to scold the pastor. He probably is busy. (So is the missionary.) But he is missing an opportunity to minister, just as if he skipped making a needed pastoral call on one of his members. And he's making it harder for the missionary to write as freely as he would like.

The pastor isn't the only one concerned. Letters come to the treasurer and others which are never answered. Let someone be responsible for answering them. It doesn't have to be the same one every time, but it should be a clear-cut responsibility. A general request in the Church bulletin for the members to write to their missionary is too vague. Hardly anyone will write. Put the duty on a specific person. He is more likely to do it, and he will get a blessing from it.

Speaking of the Church bulletin, if you have one, here is a good place to publish occasional extracts from missionary letters. Most Church bulletins are too monotonous, anyway. Here's a way to add variety and interest. And the people will read them. They'll read them much more than they would if they saw them tacked on the bulletin board.

So far we have talked only about the personal letters the missionary writes. We haven't mentioned form letters. Whether you think the missionaries are overdoing this form - letter business or not, it is a fixed part of modern missions. The missionary would like to write to so many people, and there are so many people who want to hear from him, that a form letter seems to be the only answer. Usually they are mimeographed.

Every pastor is likely to receive a number of these form letters from different missionaries. You don't have to answer them unless you want to. But they do give news that you may be able to use. In fact, some denominational missions do the mimeographing for their missionaries. Then

they can run off extra copies and send packets of them to churches that are interested. They are much more informal than magazine articles.

These form letters are usually sent to all who ask for them, or to anyone who has shown a real interest in the missionary and his work. But in his home Church he faces a problem. Should he try to send a letter to every member? It's a lot of work and expense for the already overburdened worker. Here the Church itself steps in.

It says to the missionary, "Send us your letter, and we'll see that every one of our members gets a copy," This is not only a help to the missionary, it ties him in more closely with the Church in the minds of the people. And this is as it should be. Besides, it keeps the members informed.

4. Magazines

For a greater amount of news in a smaller space we need - the missionary magazine. Each mission has its own magazine. Some are monthly, some bi-monthly, some quarterly. Some are well edited; others are merely collections of missionary letters. Some have a stated subscription price; others are sent out free of charge. But all deal almost entirely with the work of the mission which publishes them.

We are sorry to say that since 1939, when the Missionary Review of the World stopped publication, no general missionary magazine has been published in the United States. The reason is financial - too few subscribers and no subsidies. Most people are concerned with their own group, and in most cases their gifts help cover the costs of its magazine. There are, however, some Christian magazines like Moody Monthly which give a certain amount of space each month to general missionary news and interests.

Two British publications deserve mention. The International Review of Missions is a quarterly sponsored by the International Missionary Council. It has its values but is too technical for the average Christian reader. World Dominion, a bi-monthly published by World Dominion Press, is more readable and varied. But its circulation in this country has not been large.

What should the Church do about missionary magazines? We recommend three things.

First, the library. The Church library should be receiving the regular denominational papers. It should also have at least one Christian magazine of a more general nature in which there will be some coverage of missions. It should receive regularly the mission magazine of each mission in which the Church has an interest.

Second, promote circulation. The Church itself profits when it urges its members to get one or more of these magazines for themselves. An informed Church is an active Church. The two go together. In some cases a special price is offered if a number of copies are sent to one address. Of course, if there is no subscription price the problem is just distributing the papers. The most economical way is just to announce that they will be available at the door as the congregation leaves a Sunday service. But the economical way is not always the best.

Third, encourage reading. Circulation is not enough if the people don't read what they get. And in these days of much printing we skip a great deal in our reading.

Yet much of what we skip we might read if some friend were to recommend it or stir up our interest in it. So those who lead in the Church's missionary program will do well to recommend articles of special interest. But don't just say they are interesting. Tell why they are important to read. Better still, give just a taste so that people will want to know more.

III. Prayer support

It scarcely seems necessary to say more about the missionary's need for our prayers. We know he needs prayer and counts on it. Yet we don't take many practical measures to provide it. That is, as a Church we don't.

Many are familiar with the story of the missionary who had to leave his field unexpectedly. Reaching his home town on a Wednesday evening, he decided to drop in on the Church prayer meeting. Quietly he took a seat in the rear and listened.

During the whole service not a word about missions - not a prayer for the missionaries! He knew then why the going had been so hard.

This little story highlights the need to pray for missionaries in the prayer meeting. But the need is broader than that.

It is a need for the prayers of the whole Church - of all the members who know how to pray. It is part of the Church's ministry, and a part in which every member can take a part.

How to get such prayers? It takes deliberate planning. You can't do it by simply urging everyone to pray, "Lord, bless the missionaries." We pray for people when we know they have a real need. The greater the need, the more likely we are to pray. The problem then is to get the people to see the need.

The missionaries themselves are sometimes at fault here. They hesitate to make their needs known. Or sometimes they state them in such general terms you don't know just exactly what they do need and why. I don't mean physical needs; those are usually pretty clear. But we are all rather shy about revealing our spiritual needs. Yet they may be just as great. We are often afraid that they may show up our weakness, or the weakness of our work.

Of course there are many needs that are not purely personal and don't affect just the work of the one missionary. The religious persecution of believers, natural calamities such as floods, or the inroads of false cults, all call for prayer. And the missionary is usually not hesitant in asking prayer for different members of his flock.

The problem is to present the known needs in such a way that people will pray at home as well as in Church. The prayer meeting is the natural place, but it reaches only a small part of the people. A pastoral announcement and prayer on Sunday morning will alert many more. Of course the missionary society should be interested. But why not the Sunday School, too? And you can often get more sincere, unselfish praying in a young people's society than anywhere else.

Sometimes the Church will issue a missionary prayer list. If it does so the requests should be clear cut and definite. Give enough information so people will know why they are asked to pray. And when answers come, report them. There don't need to be many requests. It is better to concentrate on a very few important ones. You will get more co-operation.

~ end of chapter 25 ~
