Refining Our Focus
IN MISSIONS AT EAST WHITE OAK

The Missions Team at East White Oak has prayed, retreated, and planned over the past two years about the nature of our missions ministry here. We have much to rejoice about!

praises

- EWO has had a vision for missions from the very beginning. At the first meeting of the church, there was a motion to establish a missions program for the church.

- EWO has only grown in its vision for missions. Financially, about 33% of all giving this past year was devoted to missions. We have grown in providing short term missions opportunities. In the past two years we have sponsored 15 missions trips to such places as Germany, Russia, Zimbabwe, Bonaire, West Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Guatemala, and Colombia. This is, of course, in addition to many short term trips within the United States.

- EWO has a fantastic family of missionaries who are doing great works for the glory of God, here in the US and abroad.

- EWO has grown in its vision to raise up missionaries from our body. We sent seven people to the Urbana missions conference. We have six people in our church who are currently exploring long term missions as the calling of God upon their lives. Praise the Lord!

We also have much to consider as we reflect upon the biblical command to make disciples of all nations and our own place in obeying that command. Most particularly, we have a burden in two areas: 1) Unreached people groups—this was the area of emphasis in our mission conference this past year. We see that we need to send missionaries to unreached peoples. We define unreached peoples as peoples where less than 2% are Christian, and the indigenous church is so weak that it cannot reach their own people. 2) The training of indigenous peoples to reach their own with the Gospel. We see that we need to send missionaries who are theological teachers, trainers, and mentors to pastors in places where the church is weak and cannot train their own leaders. We believe that God is calling our church into these two very strategic areas of ministry.

Our current missions policy has much to guide us along these lines. For example, the stated goal of our current missions policy is to have 70% of supported missionaries serving outside the USA with the remaining 30% inside the USA. However, currently, 22 of our 36 regularly supported missionaries are serving in the US. This includes six missionary retirees. There are, of course, many reasons for the tendency of missionaries who are initially deployed to foreign countries to be back in the US. Some are promoted to executive positions within their mission agency. Some return due to poor health. Some return to care for aging parents or to help their young adult children to
adjust to life here. All of these are good and prudent. However, what it means is that, over time, our missions force becomes more and more US based and less and less focused on unreached peoples.

The funding of missionaries is also something that we have prayerfully considered. Our recent policy has been to support many missionaries, each at a relatively low level of support. We have become convinced that there are many benefits to supporting missionaries at much higher levels, say, at 50% or 60% of their overall financial need. Here are some of the benefits:

In the past, our decision making on financial support of a missionary was based on two primary factors: 1) Does the missionary and mission agency have a statement of faith that aligns with East White Oak’s? and 2) How well do we know this missionary? If the statement of faith aligned, and we had a strong relationship with the person, then we would move toward support as funding became available. While that provided a wonderful means of support for much powerful Gospel outreach, we are today at a point where only two of our missionaries are directly involved in ministry to unreached people groups and only four of our missionaries are directly involved in theological education. In order to emphasize these areas, our decision making must necessarily change.

So, how does it change? We must emphasize that no change will be made to existing missionaries. We love our missionaries and their work! We are committed to continuing our amazing partnerships with our current missionaries and to providing for them and praying for them as we always have.

benefits

- The congregation becomes a deeper partner with the missions work and knows the person that we are supporting.
- The training and vetting of the missionary is the responsibility of our church, not the mission agency.
- Time on home assignment is longer and deeper. The missionary serves as an additional staff member with the church while on home assignment.
- The retention of the missionary for missions service will be higher.
- Missionary kids have a real home in the US.
- The church provides an internship and training for the specific field of operation outside the US.
- The church becomes proactive in where it sends its missionaries rather than reactive to support what people want to do.
- Other churches and individuals are likely to support the missionary, knowing that significant support already exists.
Here is how we do plan to change. Going forward, we will consider applicants for missionary status at EWO under the following guidelines. (And please keep in mind that since we are just starting out on this venture, there will likely be some adaptations as we learn more about how best to do this.)

**requirements**

- The applicant is a member of our church.
- The applicant is willing and able to accept the guidance of the church in determining the destination of service.
- The applicant is devoted to going to an unreached people group or to providing theological education to groups that cannot provide this education themselves.
- The applicant commits to an extensive internship at EWO, where they will be given opportunities to do the same things that they hope to do on the field, or there is such a depth of ministry experience here at EWO that amounts to the same thing as an internship. Only after such successful ministry will the application for missionary status be considered.
- The successful applicant will then receive 50-60% of total financial support from EWO.
- The successful applicant will commit to spending 50-60% of time spent on home assignment as a staff person at EWO with special attention given to promoting missions within our church.

Quite obviously, these changes represent a significant change both for the ones who go and for the ones who send. The goers and senders are in a much higher degree of relationship and commitment to one another. The senders of EWO will need to step up, both in commitment and in prayer. The goers from EWO will need to step up, both in submission to the church vision and in prayer for the prosperity of our ministry. These sorts of changes will require some additional planning for both goers and senders, and it is possible that fresh experiences in this new way of operating will necessitate some adaptation of the above plan.

The East White Oak missions vision statement makes clear why we are moving toward this point of refocus. “The East White Oak Bible Church missions program exists to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commission to make disciples of Jesus Christ in all the world. We pursue this mandate by evangelizing unreached peoples and establishing national churches where they do not exist, and strengthening national churches where they do exist.” It is our earnest prayer that when we arrive in heaven and witness the worship of Jesus Christ by every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, we will be able to say, by God’s grace, we of East White Oak Bible Church made it possible for a least one of these people groups to be there. May God grant that desire.

The Missions Team at East White Oak