

Sojourn Church Midtown

Driving Mission Convictions

As a Church seek to do all things rooted in the Word of God, for the glory of His name and for the transformation of people's lives. When we think about what part Sojourn Church Midtown should play in the area of global missions, we are driven by the following core convictions.

Conviction #1

Our God is a missionary God and his desire is to see his glory spread among all peoples.

The Bible is a book about God and his plan to redeem man. No one can deny the truth that God loves his people and is committed to redemption. In the same way, when we look at Scripture we are convinced that the unreached world is a priority to God. From the Old Testament all the way through the New Testament, we find a theme of God's heart for the nations. Isaiah 45:22 communicates God's words when it says, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other." Habakkuk 2:14 states, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the water covers the sea." The collection of passages that describe God's heart for the nations are rich and overwhelming (Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 9:14-16 linked to Joshua 2:1-11; Isaiah 49:1-6,22; Psalm 67; Jonah; Malachi 1:10-11; Matthew 24:14; Mark 16:15; John 12:32; Acts 1:8; Revelation 5:6-10). We see God's missionary heart communicated when Jesus proclaims that his followers are to take the message of Christ's death and resurrection to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8).

Over and over again we see the theme of God desiring to see his name proclaimed and worshipped among all tribes, languages, peoples and nations on earth. This is clearly shown in Revelation 7:9-10 as believers from every people group on earth stand before God at the end of time and worship Jesus Christ in his full glory. This story in Revelation 7 displays how God longs to see his name and glory push back the veil of darkness that covers our world. It gives us the assurance that he will accomplish this task.

Simply stated, God is a missionary God who is passionate about his name being proclaimed and worshipped among all nations.

Conviction #2

Missions is defined as Great Commission fulfillment.

Sojourn affirms that there are a number of good works being done around the world that bring help and healing to many. We rejoice in this and desire to see this continue, but we also recognize that the priority for the church must include ministry that flows from the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). This is identified as ministry that focuses primarily on evangelism, discipleship and church planting. This does not mean

we ignore “deed” based ministry. In fact ,we seek to do ministry that is holistic in nature--ministry that is centered on both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40), both Word and deed. We seek to meet the needs of those around us as we proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and plant new churches. When Sojourn talks about doing international missions we see this as doing Great Commission ministry that is fully realized in planting reproducing churches. All of our international missionaries must be involved primarily in seeking to wholly fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment through gospel proclamation, discipling believers, and planting new churches. We recognize that Great Commission ministry will take on different forms in different contexts, therefore we encourage our people and partners to use the gifts they have to take the gospel forward.

Conviction #3

The local church should be active in sending out, sustaining and caring for its members serving cross-culturally.

The Great Commission was given to the church and it is the church’s responsibility to identify, train up, send, sustain, partner with, and care for its own missionaries. Our heart is to see the local church once again become deeply involved in the whole process of training, sending, and sustaining missionaries. We also recognize that there are numerous missions organizations that local churches can partner with to see this happen effectively. Sojourn is committed to partnering with like-minded mission organizations who are passionate about empowering churches in global missions.

In Acts 13:1-3 we see the elders of the church at Antioch coming together to fast and worship. As they did so, the Holy Spirit called out Paul and Barnabas to cross-cultural ministry. After they fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them and sent them off to carry out the ministry God had called them to do. From this point on we see Paul having a close connection with Antioch specifically, along with a handful of other churches throughout his ministry. For example we see in Acts 14:21, 26, after Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey, that they return to Antioch to share with the church what God had done. This pattern is repeated again after the second missionary journey in Acts 18:22-23. Acts 15:40 sheds further light when the church at Antioch gives their blessing and confirmation as they send out Mark with Barnabas and Silas with Paul.

Much of Paul’s relationship with Antioch is not fully revealed in Scripture, but it is understood that Paul had a deep and meaningful relationship with his sending church. They saw his gifts, were led through the Holy Spirit to send he and Barnabas out, and had a meaningful relationship with Paul throughout his ministry. We also see Paul having a close connection with the church at Philippi shown in the many statements he wrote to the Philippian church (Philippians 1:3-8; 4:14-19). All of this reflects the priority of the local church being heavily involved in the sending and sustaining of missionaries.

We also believe that doing international missions well must be a priority of the church. The local church must send out missionaries “in a manner worthy of God,” 3 John 6.

Conviction #4

Prayer is a vital work of international missions.

The ministry of praying for people groups, missionaries, national believers, and unreached areas of the world is not simply an add-on but a vital part of international missions. By God's grace, it is through the prayers of his people that the gospel goes forward and changes the lives of the unreached and forgotten. If we neglect praying for the lost and for the believers that work among them, we neglect the full calling to take the gospel to the nations.

The Scriptures cry out to us as believers to be active in the ministry of prayer. Ephesians 6:18-19 call us to pray for the Church and for missionaries who are reaching the lost. We read in Acts 12:5 that the church was active in praying for Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. Finally, in Luke 10, we see a call to pray for more workers to bring in the harvest of people the Lord has prepared for himself.

As we faithfully pray for the lost, those who are taking the gospel to them, and for churches around the globe, we are actively engaged in the Great Commission. Prayer must be a foundational activity as we seek to proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and plant new churches.

Conviction #5

Priority should be placed on unreached and forgotten peoples.

Frontier missions can be defined as taking the gospel where it has never been before or in some cases where it has been forgotten. This could mean an unreached village in the heart of Asia or an urban city in Europe. The idea is that our priority must be placed on working in areas where there are few believers and where there are few or no vibrant reproducing churches.

We look to Paul and his ministry as a model of taking the gospel to areas yet unreached. In Romans 15:20 Paul writes, "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation." Paul knew that there were unbelievers all over the world, but he makes it clear that it is his desire to go and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those areas that have not yet been reached with the gospel. This truth becomes clearer through what Paul says in Romans 15:19 and 23. When speaking of ministering in areas between Jerusalem and Northern Greece, Paul says that his work is done there. Despite there still being a majority of unbelievers in this area, Paul declares his work is over. How could Paul say his ministry was finished in that area when there were still so many people to reach with the gospel? What Paul means here is that he is a pioneer missionary who considers his calling as taking the gospel to an unreached area, proclaiming and discipling, planting a church, raising up new leaders, and then moving on. Paul's vision was to plant churches in

unreached areas and to see these churches reach their own communities. In light of this, Paul could say his job was done in Romans 15:19.

We believe that the focus of our work as a church in international missions is to push deeper into the darkness of our world through proclaiming the gospel and planting churches in unreached and forgotten areas. There is great value in doing ministry in areas that have established ministries, but with our limited personal and resources we are committed to working in frontier areas.

Conviction #6

Missions should happen within a team context.

As we study through the Book of Acts and look at Paul's ministry, we see that Paul placed a priority on doing cross-cultural ministry within the context of a team. Apart from waiting in Athens for his team to arrive, Paul always did ministry within a team context. In Acts 13 we see Paul and Barnabas sent out as a team. In Acts 15:39-41 we see two different teams form to go out and do ministry. Acts 16:6-10 shows us that when Paul was given the Macedonian call, he used the term "we" and "us" when talking about God's leading for ministry: "And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." We also see from Acts 18:18, 19:22, and 20:4 that Paul was on a team of eleven that served in Ephesus. Throughout Paul's ministry he placed a huge priority on doing ministry with a team.

From a practical standpoint we have seen numerous missionary couples and singles go out to a location alone, far from others, and within a period of time they either burn out or fall into deep isolation that forces them off the field. There are so many trials and struggles that missionaries face, and it only makes sense for them to live and serve within community.

Because of these things, and because we as a church place so much emphasis on living in community, we require all our people and partners serving in international missions to serve within the context of a team. Our hope is that these teams will also seek to live in healthy, gospel-centered community in both their work and personal lives.

Conviction #7

Theology matters when multiplying disciples and churches.

Part of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:20 states that followers of Christ are to "teach them to observe all that I have commanded you." It is clear from this passage that fulfilling the Great Commission is more than just proclaiming, it is also discipling and teaching. Paul's application of this is found in his commitment to plant churches. Through planting churches Paul was able to teach followers of Christ the whole counsel of God. As we read through Paul's letters we see a strong commitment to teach and raise up doctrinally sound elders and leaders. We also see a commitment to stand

against false teaching. Paul's desire was to see the churches he planted know God and stay doctrinally pure.

Our desire is to also stay true to the Word of God as we understand it. As our people and partners seek to proclaim, disciple, and plant, they will do so in a way that seeks to stay true to the Word of God. Since our aim in international missions is to plant new churches that reproduce, it is imperative to partner with others who share our biblical understanding in matters of orthodoxy as well as in matters we consider "closed handed" issues. Theology matters in all areas of life, but especially when we think about discipling others and planting new churches. When we do these things we are in essence reproducing ourselves and our doctrine.

"But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine," Titus 2:1.

Conviction #8

High value should be placed on both the progress of the mission and the ongoing spiritual renewal of the worker.

At the foundation of this conviction is the truth that love and relationship undergird God's action in the world. It is this love and relationship that moved Christ to come and dwell among men and rescue mankind (John 1:1-9). Because of this reality, God invites people into relationship with him and then their works flow out. Ephesians 2:4 says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ," and then goes on to say in verse ten, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." It is love and relationship at the core of life and work with God.

In very practical ways, this means that Sojourn's primary goal is to see our workers growing and thriving spiritually while also pushing them to invest deeply in the progress of the mission. The New Testament epistles seem to exemplify this and is why, we too, say to our missionaries, "For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God," (Phil. 1:8-11)

Conviction #9

The local church must live and give sacrificially so that all nations may have an opportunity to be transformed by the gospel.

In Psalms 67, the psalmist writes a beautiful song centered on the idea that God has blessed Israel so that they could in turn bless the Gentile nations around them with the knowledge of God. In verses 1 and 2 the psalmist requests the Lord to bless them (Israel) and make his face shine on them so that "your way may be known on earth,

your saving power among all nations." They were blessed so that they could in turn bless others.

Sojourn acknowledges the fact that we have also been blessed with the knowledge of God and have a responsibility to bless other nations with that knowledge. In order to do that more effectively we seek to be sacrificial as individuals and as a church so that more and more nations may hear the gospel of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 8:8-15 we see Paul offer a strong challenge to the Corinthian church to give in abundance to those who are in need. In verse 9 he says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." Paul establishes a picture of Christ as our example of sacrificial giving. He gave his very life so that we, and others, could be reconciled to God and have eternal life. We as a church, both as individuals and as a corporate body, long to be good stewards of what we have been given so that others, including the lost world, can be blessed with the knowledge of the glory of God.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we seek to use our finances, our gifts, and our people to sacrificially take the gospel to the nations.