



MISSIONAL PIPELINE

*A template
for the
church.*



**INTERNATIONAL
MISSION BOARD**

Develop A Missional Pipeline In Your Church

THE VISION

One of the greatest joys in ministry is watching the next generations grow up into spiritual maturity and launch into faithful, productive, adult life as followers of Jesus. Can you imagine snapshots of their journey of growth leading up to this?

- As children who can't wait to join the youth group so they can engage in mission trips.
- As middle schoolers who have already begun to share their faith with unbelievers.
- As older youth who have learned to think like a missionary and are putting their faith to work through prayer, evangelism, and discipling others.
- As young adults who are making key decisions in life in the context of God's mission.
- As older adults who leverage their experience, skills, and finances for the mission.

Envision year after year of people sent out from your church to help start churches and serve God in careers and places all over the world!

*CAN YOU IMAGINE YOUR MEMBERS INTENTIONALLY GRAPPLING WITH THEIR PART IN
GOD'S MISSION EDUCATIONALLY, VOCATIONALLY, AND GEOGRAPHICALLY?*

THE CHALLENGE

Sadly, so often those who lead children and student ministries don't stay around long enough to see such a vision become reality. Still others and their churches witness very little long-term fruit for their labor. The age-old problem continues to be **continuity**, and young people failing to catch the vision of their life on mission for God. They grow up unready to play their part and the church relies on other entities to reclaim them, if possible, to engage them in the mission.

A missional vision for present and future generations requires specific goals and processes that a church must pursue consistently and continually, even through transitions in leadership. Think of this in terms of a pipeline.

WHY A PIPELINE?

The pipeline analogy is simply a framework to develop specific steps of preparation and engagement in the mission for the next generations. It's about **intentionality**—moving us in ministry from mere talk to real doing. It's easy to say that our church is “missionally minded,” but a pipeline approach forces us to think about results. What do we want to come out at the end of the pipe? How do we make this happen?

Defining “missional”

The pipeline requires biblically sound concepts of evangelism, discipleship, and missions in the church. For instance, the *IMB Foundations* document offers this definition: “Disciple-making is the Christ-commanded, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple of Jesus to evangelize unbelievers, baptize believers, teach them the Word of Christ, and train them to obey Christ as members of His church who make disciples on mission to all nations.”¹



ADOPTING A PIPELINE APPROACH REQUIRES THE BELIEF THAT THE GREAT COMMISSION APPLIES TO EVERY CHURCH AND ALL BELIEVERS.

Missions is not an optional activity, but part of our identity as followers of Christ. As Ed Stetzer puts it, “Missional is a way of being that leads to a way of acting.”² Missions is not just a program of the church; the church exists to engage in the mission of God. This understanding of missions has all kinds of implications for our ministry. No church gets a pass on the assignment of missions. No believer is exempt from God’s call to be on mission with Him. God’s mission requires our top priority.

¹ IMB shares this and other key definitions at imb.org/beliefs-key-terms. The *Foundations* document is available at store.imb.org.

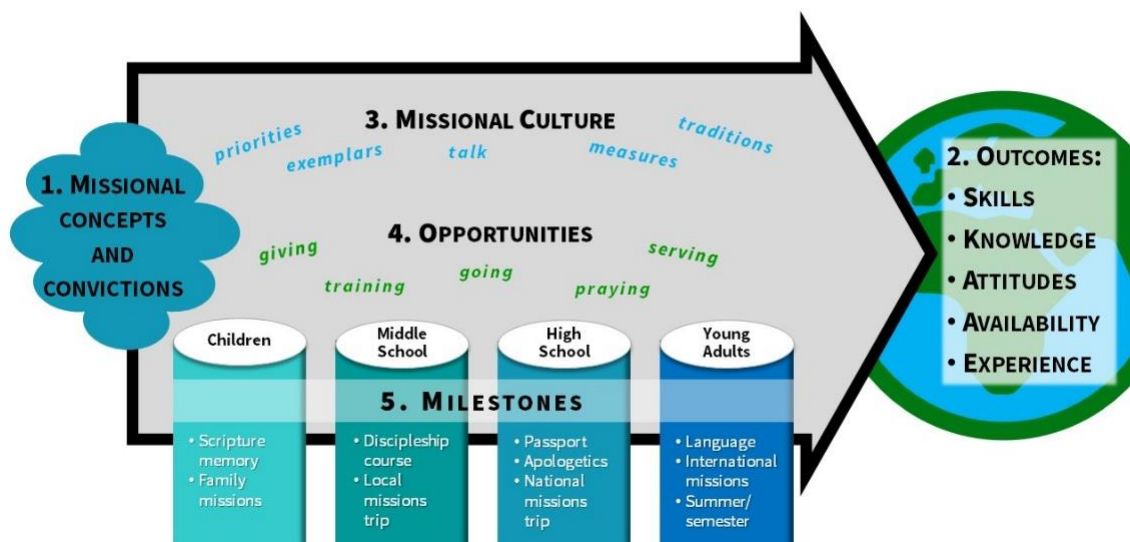
² Ed Stetzer, “Developing Missional Churches for the Great Commission, Part One,” *ChristianityToday.com*, 4/18/11, www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2011/april/developing-missional-churches-for-great-commission-part-one.html.

STEPS TO CREATING YOUR PIPELINE

The gospel and God’s Word remain consistent, but every church is unique in its setting, members, giftings, and opportunities. A pipeline template allows a church to customize its approach to developing and sending out its people. What follows in this guide are the components of an intentional plan and structure that you can develop by using or modifying existing elements and adding new ones as needed. Please notice that this should start with a clear, biblical understanding of why the church exists and where believers fit in the mission of God.

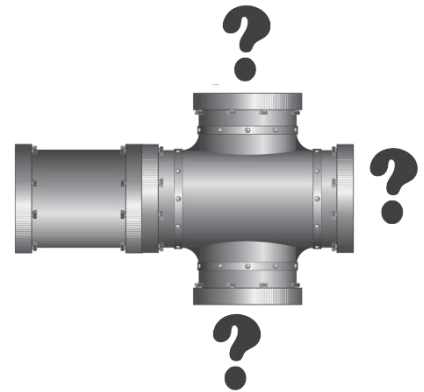
Here are five steps to construct a missional pipeline that works for your church. Read further down for more details and specific examples of these components.

1. Define the key concepts of missions and convictions for your church.
2. Identify the desired outcomes in your people.
3. Build a missional culture in your church.
4. Develop opportunities for missional awareness and engagement.
5. Establish missional milestones for each age group.



1. Define the key concepts of missions and your church's convictions.

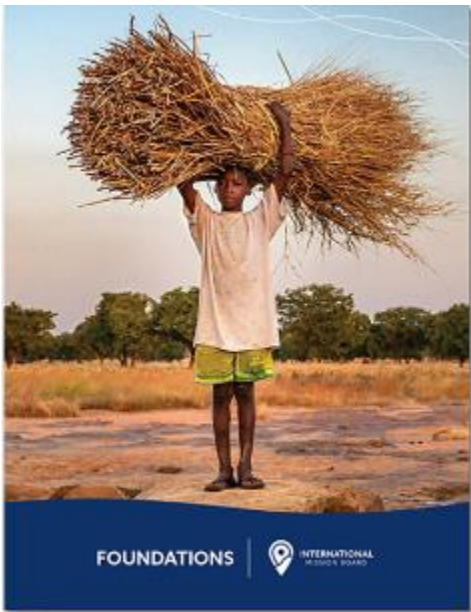
A pipeline is intended to move things in a specific direction and destination, but what if it's headed the wrong way? What if it splits into various channels and diverts resources away from what is most important? The first step in this model is a "back to the basics" consideration of your church's **identity**. Your theology profoundly affects who you are, what you do, where you go, and how you train.



Most churches have adopted a mission statement but not all have embraced a clear missional identity that permeates all they say and do. God's Word shows us the heart of mission is rescue and redemption. Evangelism, disciple-making, and church planting are essential responsibilities. Your definition of mission action can be broader than this, but it cannot be less.

*REMEMBER THAT WE CAN BUILD THE STRUCTURE,
BUT THE STRUCTURE WILL TEND TO DEFINE US.*

What are your core missiological convictions? These should come out of your definitions of such terms as the gospel, evangelism, discipleship, the church, and calling. They also should be founded on a biblical understanding of the missionary task and the role your church should play in the mission.

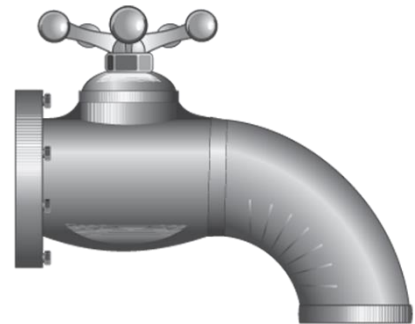


These convictions don't have to be numerous or extensive, but they must be easily understood and embraced by the whole church. Consider the use of expressions that summarize your priorities: "We send people." "The Word of God is our ultimate authority." "Everyday a missionary."

IMB has articulated a list of missional terms and concepts on its website at imb.org/beliefs-key-terms. For a more extensive treatment, see the *Foundations* document released in 2023 and available at store.imb.org.

2. Identify the desired outcomes in your people.

A pipeline not only has a destination but also an end product. This step is about results: what do you want to “deliver” or accomplish? Regarding the mission, think in terms of people, equipped and sent. Only the Holy Spirit fully knows what a person will need to fulfill his or her calling, but your church can do its part to equip members for Great Commission engagement.



First, envision members who are available and equipped to serve God in whatever ways He calls them to join in His mission. What will this look like from a practical perspective?

- What skills and competencies do you want them to have to live missionally and be able to evangelize and disciple others?
- What knowledge and experience will they need to cross cultures, defend their faith, and help start or strengthen churches?
- What attitudes and motivations do you want them to have as they make decisions about education, career, and family?
- What habits and disciplines will help them be fully available to God and set them up for faithfulness and victory over temptation?



Second, consider goals in sending people. This might require expanding your view of how God wants to use people today. It may also involve overcoming the comparison trap: gauging your church by what larger churches are doing. Remember, faithfulness with what you have been given is what God measures. The reality is that all churches have limited time, resources, and opportunities to engage the next generation.

Adopt goals that are specific, measurable, and timely. How many people would you like to see proficient in sharing the gospel and a personal testimony for Christ? ...Equipped with a passport and experienced in traveling overseas? ...Comfortable in building relationships with non-believers and people from other cultures? ...Personally acquainted with missionaries and church planters? ...Committed to serving a summer, semester, or a year in missions?

3. Build a missional culture in your church.

Pipelines need pressure for there to be flow and output. In terms of people and the mission, think of this as your church’s culture, which permeates all you say and do as a congregation. Your culture will drive things even more than your programs and planned opportunities.



Simply put, culture is the shared values of a group, but a deeper understanding sees culture as “the underlying assumptions and beliefs shared by a group of people that operates unconsciously in a church or organization’s view of itself and its environment.”³ An older church may have a culture largely derived from its traditions, history, and place in the community. A younger church is more likely to take on the personality and values of its current leadership.

THE MISSIONAL CULTURE OF A CHURCH CAN BE SHAPED IN CONSCIOUS AND INTENTIONAL WAYS, BUT IT ALWAYS PROVES ITSELF IN THE UNCONSCIOUS EXPRESSION OF THE MEMBERS.

For missions to become a real part of the identity of a church, and consequently embraced by members, it can’t just be mere talk and good intentions. The challenge in building a missional culture is to pair stated values with real actions—both are needed. Consider these diagnostic questions:

- How much do we talk about the mission of God and our church’s role in it?
- Does what we say about missions match with our actual priorities in our ministries and programs?
- Do we believe that young people as followers of Christ have a real part to play in the mission of God right now, not just in their future?
- What are our measures of success, and do they match with our missional values?

Let’s get practical. If you approach it with integrity, developing a missional culture to impact the world through your members is well within reach.

³ Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 6-11, quoted in Todd Adkins, *Pipeline: Creating and Curating a Recruiting Culture*, (Nashville: Lifeway Leadership, 2018), 5-6.

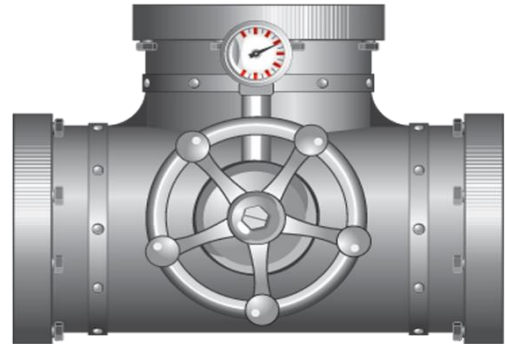
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- **Go ahead and talk.** Weave the concepts of the Great Commission into every expression of the church’s mission and vision. Always be answering the question, “This is who we are.”
 - **Cast the vision.** Develop the refrain of “we send people” on mission, such as children to their lost family members, youth to their schools and neighborhoods, students to college campuses, and adults to the marketplace.
 - **Integrate the mission across the whole church.** Avoid separate and disconnected efforts in missions. Unify your approach to build a strong tie between every aspect of next generation ministry and the rest of the church.
 - **Teach the grand narrative of the Bible.** Let the mission of God be a frequent subject in sermons and Bible studies.
 - **Expose young people to “missional exemplars.”** Find and highlight people in the church who characterize a life on mission. Help students see the diverse possibilities of God’s calling.
 - **Integrate missional prayer as a regular function in gatherings.** Educate your people about unreached peoples, the needs of missionaries, and the opportunities to support missions through prayer.
 - **Develop annual traditions and entry points of missions involvement.** Consider church-wide events such as mission offerings, mission studies, prayer emphases, and mission fairs.



Perhaps the most powerful aspect of a missional culture is **expectation**. What does the church expect of its members, and especially the next generation? The default, thanks to the influence of our society, is a mindset of consumerism, tourism, and victimization. What will your church say and do to achieve a different result: raising up a generation of missionaries and change agents?

4. Develop missional opportunities for missional awareness and engagement.

A pipeline is a channel with twists and turns along the way to a destination. It often involves intermediate stops and processes along the way that change what it contains. Perhaps the most tangible step in the missional pipeline process is putting together the actual ways you will inform, train, and engage the next generations in missions.



First consider what your church is **already doing** that can relate to the pipeline. This could include mission trips, missions giving, prayer, training opportunities, a mission fair, people group adoption, and so on. It might come as a surprise that stopping something you are doing may be just as important as starting something new.

*THE PIPELINE CONCEPT DOES NOT NECESSITATE YOU DO MORE THINGS,
BUT THAT YOU DO NEEDFUL THINGS.*

Second, recognize that missions awareness and engagement must start with the youngest. Mission education is a crucial element many churches have ignored or forgotten. Students are raised up without knowing the whole biblical narrative, their Christian heritage, the priority of missions in our denomination, or the opportunities and resources afforded through the Cooperative Program and Baptist entities. Long ago (in a universe far away) many churches offered weekly children's programs focused on these things. While this



strategy is unlikely to return in an era of hyper-busy families, there are effective alternatives. Children's ministries can incorporate missions teaching and hands-on engagement into VBS, Sunday School, weekly worship, and resources for families. Youth ministries can also incorporate missions education and awareness as part of an ongoing program of Bible study and worship, as well as in retreats and special experiences such as "Secret Church."

Third, know that “going” opportunities continue to be a prime way to give people an eye-opening, life-changing experience in sharing the gospel with unreached peoples. Mission trips can open their eyes to the ways God is at work in the world. Even so, beware of undertaking mission projects that minimize the role of the gospel, ignore the principles of good missiology, or prioritize the comfortable, convenient, and most satisfying destinations over the hard places that have the least access to the gospel.

While mission trips are certainly a valuable component, but don’t “put all your eggs into one basket.” Consider additional ways to involve as many people as possible in meaningful mission experiences and to engage them in reaching the nations:

- **Local mission projects.** Aim for opportunities to lead members to reach out to other ethnic groups, help new church plants, and especially to share the gospel or disciple others.
- **Calls to prayer.** Set aside occasional worship gatherings to spend the whole time in praying for unreached peoples, mission efforts, or missionaries and church planters.
- **Mission trip preparation.** Incorporate evangelism training and a study of the biblical basis of missions as requirements for the trip.
- **Missionary adoption.** Get members involved in the church’s efforts to sponsor missionaries and maintain a connection with their work. Consider including students as members on the church missions team or committee.
- **Disaster relief.** In addition to other adults, recruit college students and young adults for disaster relief training and engagement.
- **Language study.** Lead students to pursue a second language or certification in sign language or teaching ESL (English as a Second Language). Offer introductory language classes at church.
- **Mission awareness offerings.** Create fundraising events that link missions giving and learning that focus on gospel ministry that meets a specific human need (settling of refugees, stopping human trafficking, Bible translation, etc.).

5. Establish missional milestones for each age group.

A pipeline that extends for much of a distance needs checkpoints along the way to monitor the progress and status of what it carries. Similarly, churches and families have recognized the value of setting up markers for young people to commemorate their growth, increasing abilities, and new responsibilities in life. The Christian perspective identifies these markers within the life of faith and seeks to encourage families and young people toward spiritual maturity. The missional pipeline approach simply adds the outward focus of a life beyond self in obedience to God.



Choose milestones that will clarify what you expect of your students. Use them to affirm and celebrate their progress. Similar to but lesser than the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, let them be anchor points and reminders to the church of what is important and what bonds people together in your congregation.

Milestones will likely be unique to your church, but here are some possibilities:

- **For children:**
 - Complete a Scripture memory assignment
 - Participate in a family missions project
 - Meet a missionary or church planter
 - Participate in a missions offering
- **For middle school youth**
 - Lead someone to Christ
 - Complete a basic discipleship course
 - Participate in a missional prayer experience
 - Participate in a mission trip away from home
- **For high school youth**
 - Complete an evangelism training course
 - Secure a passport
 - Disciple a new believer
 - Engage in a prayer walk for unreached people
 - Complete a study of world religions or Christian apologetics
 - Participate in an out-of-state and/or international mission trip
- **For college students/young adults**
 - Certifications, such as language training or disaster relief training
 - Serve for a summer or semester internationally

ADDITIONAL TIPS

1. Change your scorecard, from seating capacity to sending.
2. The pastor and senior leadership must be the champions of missional culture and convictions, but all leaders need buy-in and input with the details of the pipeline.
3. Transition in ministry leadership can be the bane of any ministry strategy or philosophy. Consider how the missional pipeline can become a consistent feature in how your church does church.
4. Make sure you are constantly telling the story of what God is doing in the world. Brokenness and lostness are part of the story, but the next generations are motivated by the victories of God.
5. The easy days of missions mobilization in the West are past. Mission trips are expensive. The world is dangerous. Many parents are protective. The economic aspect of the American dream is in opposition to many of our missional initiatives. Prepare for the long haul to overcome these dynamics.
6. Be aware that a true embrace of missional culture will challenge the status quo of your church and ministry. Are you ready for ethnic diversity in membership and leadership? For committed members to push the envelope beyond your comfort zones?

