

## A Multiple Motives Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships

Nehrbass, Kenneth; Dunaetz, David R.

Preprint / Preprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Nehrbass, K., & Dunaetz, D. R. (2018). A Multiple Motives Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships. *Missiology*, 46(4), 388-405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829618798335>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-ND Licence (Attribution-NoDerivatives). For more Information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0>

Nehrbass, K. & Dunaetz, D. R. (2018). A multiple motives theory of church and missionary relationships. *Missiology: An International Review*, 46(3), 388-406.

# A Multiple Motives Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships

Kenneth Nehrbass

Biola University

David R. Dunaetz

Azusa Pacific University

**Abstract:** This grounded theory study examines the motives for relationships between local churches and missionaries: What motivates churches to enter into a relationship with a missionary, to continue this relationship, and to end it? Similarly, what motivates missionaries to begin, continue, or end relationships with a local church? We used purposive stratified sampling to select 17 missionaries and church mission leaders to interview for this study. We performed semi-structured interviews with both groups to discover their understanding of why they form, maintain, and dissolve relationships with each other. Multiple motives influenced all participants. These motives can be broadly categorized as either relationship-focused motives or task-focused motives. Furthermore, the task-focused motives can either be centered on specific goals shared by churches and missionaries (e.g., starting a reproducing church among a specific people group) or on specific processes (e.g., evangelizing or feeding the poor). Although all participants had multiple motives, each participant emphasized some motives over others. The motives present in each party influence many aspects of their relationship, including their communication, financial involvement, and the purpose of the church's short-term mission trips to the missionary's setting. In contrast to social exchange theory which provides a framework to understand conditions under which a relationship will be maintained or ended, the Multiple Motive Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships goes further; it describes specific motives that exist which influence whether a relationship begins, continues, or ends.

**Key words:** missionary, church, relationships, motivation, motives, social exchange

Midwestern First Baptist<sup>1</sup> supports missionaries who grew up in the church without paying much heed to the kind of missionary work being done. Mountain Bay Church in Southern California adjusts its levels of financial support for its missionaries based on the missionaries' reports of the number of churches planted and baptisms performed each year. Saints Church, just down the street from Mountain Bay, sends monthly checks to the denominational mission board, but does not particularly cultivate personal relationships with those missionaries. Missionary-church relationships are motivated by various factors, depending on the organizational culture of the churches and mission organizations, as well as the expectations and values of the specific missionaries and local church mission leaders. This study is an attempt to find common themes in the motives for church and missionary relationships.

As missiologists who are former missionaries but also involved in our own local churches, we have found ourselves desiring to better understand the motivation behind missionary and church relationships. What motivates churches to enter into a relationship with missionaries and financially support them? What motivates churches to maintain the relationship or end it? Similarly, what motivates missionaries to start, maintain, and end relationships with churches? In addition, how do these motivations shape expectations that missionaries have for their supporting churches? And how do they shape expectations that churches have for the missionaries they support?

We interviewed missionaries and church leaders who make decisions about

missions in order to discover their understanding of the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of church and missionary relationships. This article will first review the literature that frames a discussion of the missionary-church relationship and then outline the study design. The results will lead to what we call the Multiple Motive Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships. Implications concerning communication, finances, and short-term missions will be discussed, with the goal of helping both missionaries and churches better understand one another.

### *Literature on the Missionary-Church Relationship*

A number of popular works discuss the relationship between missionaries and local churches, including such topics as reaching the world through members of the local church (Beals 1995; Horner 2011; Guder et al. 1998) and the local church as a source of missionary care (Priolo 1993, Kel 2013), or the relationship between the sending church, the missionary, and the missions agency (Chapin 1998; Liew 2017; Metcalf 1993). Protestant missiologists and theologians seem to be in consensus that "sending well" requires the specialization of parachurch organizations and resources provided by local churches in order to carry out the missionary mandate (Camp 1995; Smither 2017).

However, little academic work has been done to study what motivates churches to enter, maintain, and dissolve their relationships with specific missionaries. Several psychologists have examined the selection criteria that missionary agencies use for maximizing the organizational fit of candidates (Cuerton 1983; Ferguson 1983) or for maximizing missionaries' effectiveness on the field (Kleiwier 1983); Lancaster's (2016) dissertation examined the "comprehensive sending strategy" of a

---

<sup>1</sup> All names of churches and participants in this study are pseudonyms.

multi-site megachurch in Texas, concluding that this church functioned largely as a “passive financier” of those who were convinced of a call to missions but delegated selection, training, and member care to parachurch organizations. However, little research has sought to understand the motivation behind local churches’ selection and evaluation of missionaries.

Missionary and church relationships have also been described with social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005; Dunaetz 2017) showing missionary and church relationships are to some degree both *communal* and *exchange* focused. Communal relationships are unconditional and are closely linked to emotional investment in others (Clark & Mills, 1979, 2011), such as the way a parent cares for the needs of a child. Exchange relationships, on the other hand, are conditioned upon mutual benefit. In exchange relationships, parties perform (usually subconsciously and quite primitively) a cost-benefit analysis on these relationships to determine if they are worth maintaining (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005; Kelly et al. 2003; Kelly & Thibaut 1978).

Dunaetz (2017) also suggested that the missionary-church relationship typically involves a power imbalance because missionaries are more dependent on churches than churches are on missionaries. This dependency may create stress in missionaries and alter the way missionaries and their church families relate to each other.

Although the concepts of exchange and communal relationships are helpful for understanding why churches and missionaries may maintain or discontinue relationships with each other (Dunaetz 2017), social exchange theory does not explain what churches and missionaries expect of each other; it simply predicts the conditions under which a relationship will continue or not. It does not describe the

motives that lead to the formation of church and missionary relationships, nor the motives that actually exist for maintaining such relationships. Motives are sets of thoughts and feelings that direct an individual towards a set of preferred experiences and goals (McClelland 1984). The motives possessed by individuals typically lead to behaviors that, at least potentially, produce the desired experience or goal. Motives are influenced by one’s physical needs, psychological needs (e.g., the need for meaning in life, the need for self-esteem, and social needs), abilities, values, social contexts, and environmental conditions (e.g., resources and location) (McClelland 1984). For missionaries and local church mission leaders, Christian values derived from the Bible are likely to be prominent in the formation of the motives. But how do these values interact with all the variables in a 21<sup>st</sup> century North American context? The purpose of this study is to explore and better understand these motives so that missionaries and churches can more effectively serve one another and carry out their calling.

## Methods

We designed a qualitative study using the grounded theory approach to discover how missionaries and leaders (both lay and staff) of mission programs in local churches understand the missionary-church relationship. We performed 17 open-ended, semi-structured interviews with participants: Seven missionaries, seven church leaders, and three who have been in both roles, first as missionaries and now as missions pastors.

We used stratified purposive sampling (Patton 2002: 240) to identify participants from a wide variety of churches and mission organizations. While this non-probabilistic sampling is not generalizable to a population the way a quantitative study is,

qualitative studies with purposive sampling may be transferable to wider contexts that share the same characteristics as the participants (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). The emergence of various themes helped us determine the questions to pose to subsequent participants in the study – a process grounded theorists refer to as theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss 2015). This iterative process of theory development allowed us to understand the various parameters of each of the theoretical codes. We continued to interview participants until we approached “theoretical saturation” (Glaser 2001: 191), the point in the process at which the interviews ceased to generate any valuable new data concerning missionaries and church leaders’ motives and expectations.

After interviewing the participants, we coded the transcribed interviews in order to more systematically discover thematic categories that answer our main research question concerning motives. This analysis enabled us to develop the Theory of Multiple Motives for Church and Missionary Relationships.

Since this study is drawn from interview data, the theory is limited by the degree of self-reflection and openness of the participants. For example, missionaries and church leaders may have defaulted to explaining how things “should be done” rather than how they actually occur. One missions pastor at first claimed that his church only supports missionaries who fit the vision of the church; but later he shared that “there were some missionaries hanging on who knew the senior pastor from his college days.” To mitigate these limitations, we asked participants to focus on their real-life examples of missionary-church relationships. Also, the personal values and biases of the researchers can also affect the trustworthiness of the study. We have attempted to bracket our bias, and have

performed member checks and peer review to establish the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam & Tisdell 2016).

## Findings

The classification of themes revealed relatively distinct categories of motives for churches and missionaries entering into, maintaining, and terminating relationships. Two main categories were relationship-focused motives and task-focused motives. The task-focused motives were centered either on specific goals shared by churches and missionaries or on specific processes that both deemed important.

All missionaries and church leaders held both relationship-focused goals and task-focused goals in their relationships, but missionaries and church leaders tended to emphasize one of these set of motives over the other. The same is true for goal-centered and process-centered task-focused motives. Some churches and missionary relationships were especially motivated by achieving specific goals and others by carrying out processes.

As an example of how this varying emphasis on motives played out, Pastor Bob from Beachside Fellowship explained “[The missionary’s] ministry goals must align with the church’s values” (a task-focused motive); but he also strongly emphasized that all the missionaries were considered “partners” with the church and “had to have some type of relationship with the church” if they expected financial support (a relationship-focused motive). While mildly endorsing a goal-centered, task-focused motive, he full-heartedly expressed a relationship-focused motive. As another example, Linda, the missions pastor at Community Church Los Angeles stressed that their missionaries need to provide the congregation opportunities to “go” (Matt. 28:18) via short-term mission opportunities

(a goal-centered, task-focused motive), but she also mentioned that any time there is an earthquake or tsunami, her church wanted to demonstrate its concern (a process-centered task-focused motive).

We also found that each of the three main types of motives (relationship-focused motives and the two types of task-focused motives) could be described with a metaphor (Table 1). The dominating type of motive present is likely to affect many aspects of the church/missionary relationship, including the nature of communication, financial support, and the purpose of the church’s short-term mission trips.

about; they are more likely to contribute financially, even into retirement, to those they have loved and spent time with over the years.

One pastor of a church with many “homegrown missionaries” said he could not send out teams without that relational connection. “I don’t want to invite people to give their lives to a mission field and then not have the infrastructure in the church that says, ‘We want to walk in it with you.’” Other missions pastors described this motivation using terms such as “the need to feel connected.” They typically wanted to be “loyal” to “their missionaries”. Some indicated that they were so motivated to maintain the relationship that even the lack of success in ministry or doctrinal

Table 1: Metaphors for the Principal Types of Motives in Missionary/Church Relationships

| Motive                                 | Metaphor     | Role of the Church | Role of the Missionary |
|--|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Relationship-focused motives           | Family       | Parent             | Child                  |
| Task-focused motives: Goal-centered    | Business     | Employer           | Employee               |
| Task-focused motives: Process-centered | Charity Work | Fund Raiser        | Aid Worker             |

**Relationship-Focused Motives**

The first category of motives in church-missionary relationships focuses on the relationship between the missionary and the church. We wanted to understand why missionaries and church leaders felt that the relational aspect was so important for the missionary-church relationship. Missionaries felt that close relationships made prayer, emotional, and financial support more likely: Church members are more likely to pray for the missionaries whom they know; they are more likely to visit and encourage missionaries with whom they feel a connection; they are more likely to read the newsletters of people they care

differences would not weaken their commitment to their missionaries.

**The Missionary and Church as a Family.**

The missionary and church relationship was often described in familial terms, the church generally playing the role of the parent and the missionary, the child. Just as parents support children, churches finance missionary activity by supporting missionaries. This is especially true for missionaries who are considered to be “homegrown”, missionaries who have grown up in a church and are thus considered offspring of the church’s ministry. One pastor proclaimed, “We

support every missionary that comes out of our church.”

Just as people join families by marriage, birth, or adoption, missionaries and churches initiate relationships in various ways. As for those who were not homegrown, missionaries become connected to a church in various ways, such as by marrying someone who grew up in the church or by developing relationships with individuals in the church. One pastor said that if a couple interested in missions asks the church to be their “home church,” he tells them, “Start serving!” because the church needs to see them serving in ministry faithfully in order to evaluate their capabilities, both ministry and social, before allowing them to be identified as one of the church’s own.

Many missionaries spoke of churches with which they had relationships, including financial support, but which were not their home churches. They generally felt that most of these churches wanted to know them personally and that this was a prerequisite for financial support. Similarly, some missions pastors were open to the idea of supporting missionaries with a different home church, but they believed that it was essential that the church get to know them first.

### **Finances as Parental Support.**

Relationship-focused motives were clear in the financial aspect of church-missionary relationships. Missionaries typically played the role of children who were supported by churches who, in turn, played the role of parents by providing financial and emotional support. Paternalistic language to refer to a missionary’s relationship with a church was not rare. As one missionary put it, “They take care of us.”

Missionaries who were not homegrown generally entered into relationships with churches in order to

receive financial support. If a church had the means, it would begin supporting a missionary once the relationship was sufficiently strong. One missions leader described the typical missionary supported by her church, “They’re very connected to the pastor-elders and have some friendships there.” Her church would respond with finances, prayer, short-term teams, and friendship. Tom, the missions pastor at Valley Church succinctly summarized his church’s approach to missionary support, “People invest in relationships.” Another pastor said that when he receives letters from missionaries he does not know personally, “I just throw them away.” He does not want his church to support missionaries “if there’s no real connection with the church. I want our church to be involved in sending, not simply as financial donors... there would have to be an actual connection, an actual partnership. Somebody receiving money from us doesn’t make a partnership.”

Most missionaries and most missions leaders were able to tell of stories where one or the other (usually the church) ended the relationship because they were displeased with something. For example, one church cut off support because a missionary refused to use only the King James Bible while in Asia. Another church and missionary separated because the missionary was expected to work full-time at the church during home assignment building relationships. One missions pastor explained how the church cut off many of its missionaries who had weak relationships with the church in order to increase their financial commitments to missionaries who were better known, almost exclusively to those who came out of the congregation, “so we could celebrate them and be more intentional about being relational with them.”

Like parents with adult children, churches express their concern for their missionaries through both direct and indirect financial support. In addition to regular financial support for salary, benefits, and budgeted items, churches may finance special projects for missionaries to whom they feel especially close. When one missionary in Central Africa needed to replace a four-wheel drive truck, his home church raised the funds in one weekend. Churches often also provide missionaries with indirect financial support, such as by providing housing and cars while on home assignment, as is typical of parents providing for their adult children when they come home from out of town for a brief visit.

Occasionally a church's concern for its missionaries enables the relationship to continue even when the missionary cannot continue in his or her original missionary role. One pastor in California told a story about a couple who were missionaries in West Africa. The couple had to relocate to Texas because of their son's health, but this family-oriented church in California actually increased support. This couple and their child were seen as part of the family, regardless of where they lived or what they were doing. Some churches continue to support, financially or emotionally, missionaries after they retire or leave their mission organization. One former missionary who was asked to resign from his mission organization continues to be invited to speak regularly in one of his former supporting churches because the relationships that he formed with church members are so strong that everyone wants to maintain them.

**Communication as Family Dialog.** In families, communication is essential for maintaining a relationship, especially once the adult children move out of the home.

Similarly, communication is viewed as essential by both missionaries and churches to maintain the relationships that both desire. And just as adult children are expected to share more information with their parents than parents are expected to share with their children, missionaries are expected to initiate and take responsibility for this communication. A missionary is expected to communicate regularly, not particularly to provide information about the progress of the work, but to "stay connected." One missionary described a church which was quite "hands-off" about his work, but was simply concerned about maintaining the relationship, "Keep us informed, and we're with you." The most common theme in our interviews was "personal connection," appearing over 111 times.

The most common information that missionaries communicated to churches in order to maintain the relationship focused on family news and the progress of their work, often framed as prayer requests. The information that the churches provided missionaries was much more limited, typically focused on financial support, scheduling meetings for the missionary when on home assignment, and the organization of short-term mission trips.

Just as parents of adult children occasionally travel to visit their children and grandchildren, perhaps bringing them gifts and memories from home, so churches visit missionaries on the field through short-term mission teams or a visit from the missions pastor. The stated goal of such trips and visits is generally to encourage missionaries or to serve the people with whom the missionary works. However, some missionaries and some missions pastors wondered to what degree the desire to visit exotic places and the desire for the positive feelings that come from helping the poor motivate such trips. One missions pastor



was distressed that his congregation spends \$3000 a person to go to Southeast Asia “to pass out toothbrushes...and multi-colored bracelets that explain the gospel.” But as he further reflected on the value of the work, he explained that the trips were not as much about accomplishing a task as they were about maintaining a supportive relationship with the missionaries.

### ***Task-Focused Motives: Goal-Centered***

In contrast to motives that are focused on maintaining and developing high quality relationships between missionaries and churches, two categories of motives emerged from the interviews that focused on the missionary task, motives that focused on achieving specific ministry goals and motives that focused on assuring that a process was carried out.

Rather than giving priority to the quality of the missionary/church relationship, some participants’ motives for the missionary-church relationship centered on achieving ministry goals. These goal-centered motives are often accompanied by expectations of doctrinal and lifestyle fit, regular reports of the work, and opportunities to mobilize the congregation for short-term mission trips. Churches and missionaries who have the strongest goal-centered approach are more interested in accomplishing the missionary task than they are in “connectedness.”

Participants indicated that the church/missionary relationships that were focused on achieving goals were more tenuous than those which focus on maintaining high quality relationships. Since the reason for the church/missionary relationship is to accomplish a task, goal-centered church leaders sometimes have asked missionaries to “re-apply” for support from the church when there was a change in the church’s ministries priorities due a

change of leadership (a “regime change”, as one missionary described it) or budgetary restraints. In these circumstances, church leaders determine to what degree the missionary’s work is accomplishing the desired goals.

**The Missionary and Church as Employee and Employer.** As we coded the interviews, we developed a metaphor to describe church/missionary relationships that are motivated by goal achievement: the relationship between employer (the church) and an employee (the missionary). Participants described how the church measures productivity in terms of some measure or standard, such as churches planted, Bible translations produced, or geographic regions evangelized. If the productivity is sufficient, the missionary continues to be employed (supported financially). However, unlike businesses, the underlying motive is not profit, but rather to live out the church’s vision and values, typically to contribute to fulfilling the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20) out of love, commitment and obedience to Jesus Christ.

For missionaries, one of the advantages of encountering goal-driven churches is the desire of such churches to establish partnerships with previously unknown missionaries who wish to carry out tasks congruent with the church’s goals. Whereas the relationship-focused motives lead to a prioritization of supporting homegrown missionaries, churches with goal-driven motives are less interested in a missionary’s history with the church. Rather, these relationships are formed to achieve a common goal.

**Financial Support as an Employer-Employee Contract.** Another metaphor we developed to describe this employer-employee relationship is that of a contract. In church-missionary relationships that are

motivated by the accomplishment of goals, a church finances missionaries to ensure that the church's vision is carried out. In these relationships, financial support may be raised or lowered according to the perceived value of the missionary's work (in contrast to the perceived value of the missionary/church relationship).

Two churches in our study described their use of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for every missionary and project. Whereas church/missionary relationships motivated by the desire for high quality relationships rarely discuss the conditions under which financial support is accorded and ended, an MOU may state the specific conditions of this financial support. One church's MOUs specify that the missionary's support will end once a Disciple Making Movement (DMM) is evident in a missionary's field. Another missions pastor indicated that an essential question is, "Are we getting the bang for our buck in this whole endeavor?" The MOU serves to answer that question.

Because of the contractual nature of the relationship, missionaries who are involved in goal-focused churches may not sense the same encouragement, communication, and partnership that relationship-motivated churches provide. One missionary stated that he does not know if one of his goal-focused supporting churches prays for him and he could not articulate how they provide emotional support, "There's not a lot of interaction. Every once in a while they send us a doctrinal statement to sign." Another missionary agreed, "[Such] churches are not very proactive in doing a whole lot, whether it's caring for us or showing interest... I don't know what kind of relationship we have, other than the fact that we are on their list." When this missionary visited these goal-driven churches on home assignment, he described his visits in terms of "adding

value" to their church's ministry rather than connecting to individuals who valued their relationship with him.

Missionaries who leave the field, retire, or take an extended home assignment may lose their support, and relationship, with goal-focused churches. One missionary said people in her home church "don't like to be giving money to people that are sitting at home....it's not glamorous." A missions coordinator in Southern California expressed his concern about missionaries on extended assignments in North America:

Some may be missionaries in name, but they've gone home to take care of their parents and they are working in their local church—we're almost funding another church's staff member. Maybe they have an outreach to people of another country, but aren't really on the field. We are struggling with what to do with that.

#### ***Doctrine and Lifestyle Accountability.***

Goal-focused missionary/church relationships demand that missionaries and churches be aligned in terms of doctrine, lifestyle, and vision. This typically is manifested by churches holding missionaries accountable both for their doctrine and lifestyle and for their vision and ministry.

Goal-centered churches may regularly (or irregularly) require missionaries to sign statements of faith and make lifestyle commitments. Missionaries and mission leaders specifically mentioned doctrinal and lifestyle issues such as baptism by immersion, abstention from alcohol, the use of the King James Bible, spending a certain amount of time in daily Bible reading, and the role of women in ministry. Doctrinal and lifestyle fit ensures that the missionary can serve as a lived-example of the church's vision.

Whereas relationship-motivated churches view their missionaries as intrinsically valuable, goal-motivated churches may value their missionaries to the degree that they incarnate the church's values. Several church leaders explained that the missionaries they support serve as examples to the congregation of people who leave the safety of the known, meet people, and share the gospel. One missions pastor mentioned that "model missionaries" supported by his congregation "provide the church with a name and face and a personalization of what [ministry] can be like." Some mentioned that announcements about missionaries and missionary participation during the worship service are as much about reinforcing the vision of the church as they are about providing information about and encouragement to missionaries. Incarnating the church's moral values is also important; three missions leaders said that the sexual infidelity of a missionary would result in the dissolution of the missionary-church relationship.

***Vision and Ministry Fit.*** Goal-centered churches may look for vision and ministry fit when choosing a missionary to support. Bob, the pastor of Beachside Fellowship, examines whether a missionary's work fits into "one of five buckets." The missionary's ministry must align with the church's five core values: transformational, relational, intergenerational, missional, and generous. If missionaries' ministries shift away from these core values, the church may terminate its relationship with them.

Vision and ministry fit may include geography, effectiveness, or need. One mission leader's church sensed a need to "specialize in one area, rather than all over the place." His church settled on Indonesia as the geographic focus because they were "seeing more church growth there than in more resistant countries." One missionary said one of his churches began supporting

his wife while she was single because they did not support any missionaries to Africa at the time. Another missions leader said his church was more likely to support missionaries going to the Islamic world than to Latin America because of their priority to reach the least evangelized. "They are ministering in closed countries, Muslim countries, where we don't have much of a presence."

One missions leader described an in-depth denominational program that he leads for helping churches discover the type of outreach and geographic area that best matches the congregation's passions:

I ask, "What's the personality of the church?" and "What are their passions?" I try to figure out, "Is there something that fits who the church is? Is there part of its identity that can eventually serve as a focus?" For example, does a church have a particular passion for social justice issues...Once we've done all of that, then the church decides...At the end of the process, [the church leaders] announce to the church a particular direction in order to ensure the whole church is on board. [The church then adopts] a particular phrase like, "We want to do church-planting among the unreached people in Northern Europe."

**Communication as Accountability.**

Whereas relationship-focused motives encourage two-way communication, task-focused motives expect regular communication from missionaries to the supporting church in the form of metrics and reports. Mountain Bay Church asks its missionaries to provide an annual report that is similar to what the church produces for its annual self-evaluation. The church asks for both the missionaries' annual goals and the metrics that they have used to track their progress in meeting the following:

1. Attendance goals
2. Baptism goals
3. Small group goals
4. Use of spiritual gifts goals
5. Goals concerning the host culture's financial support of the ministry

If missionaries do not make significant progress on their goals, the church works with them to phase out the relationship over time. Mountain Bay Church recognizes that not all missionaries are directly involved in church planting or evangelism. Their accountability system allows for three possible tracks of ministry: Community development, health, and evangelism. While not all missionaries may be baptizing and helping churches grow, they "must be involved in projects that move all five of these metrics forward."

In contrast to Mountain Bay Church, Valley Church is more flexible in the type of goals that their missionaries need to achieve. Tom, the missions pastor recognizes that not all missionaries are church planters and that not all missionary work can be measured. Instead, missionaries are evaluated based on their own goals and gifting:

We evaluate our missionaries on their effectiveness in what they are called to do. If they're called to do evangelism, are they really reaching

people? If they're called to do holistic development, are they really doing that? If they're called to do education, are they really doing that? We send out a questionnaire that asks missionaries how true are they staying to the original vision that they went out with... If not, then their support either stays at a certain level, or in some cases, we might decide as a board that we do not necessarily want to continue supporting this missionary.

Missionaries sense the weight of being accountable to goal-motivated churches. Earl, a missionary in South America, mentioned that the missions pastor of one of his churches visited him on the field. "He went back and reported to the elder board that we were not doing enough and so they shouldn't support us." The church then cut its support.

Several missionaries were skeptical concerning the use of these reports and metrics, which can be time-consuming to complete and of limited value. The subjectivity and lack of standardized methods of measuring progress on the goals means that the requesting church may have difficulty accurately interpreting such a report. Similarly, reporting progress on goals may better reflect a missionary's ability to reframe setbacks and failures than actual progress in the ministry. A missionary who spent 20 years in Eastern Europe expressed it this way:

The annual reviews [perhaps somebody reads them and perhaps] somebody responds. Or otherwise, you spend hours writing this, and maybe even share struggles, and then nobody even cares, no one even responds. That happened year after year, after year, after year for me.

A church's ability to require an end-of-year report does not require the ability to respond

meaningfully to the data collected, nor the ability to make appropriate decisions based on the material collected.

### **Short-Term Missions as Vision**

**Fulfillment.** Whereas relationship-focused churches especially use short term mission projects to encourage their missionaries abroad, goal-motivated churches may view short term missions as a fulfillment of the church's vision. One missionary's church "did a survey of the DNA of the church" and discovered geographical areas the congregation wanted to visit. Now they specifically support missionaries who can support short-term trips to those regions. A missions coordinator told of his medium-sized church which "gives special consideration" to one church in Mexico and one in China, because these churches can host short term missions from his congregation. The pastor of Mountain Bay said his church establishes relationships with missionaries to whom they can send short term teams "because of the experience that we can provide Mountain Bayers with." These short term experiences enable church members to live out their church's vision and increase interest in the church's local outreach efforts.

### ***Task-Focused Motives: Process-Centered***

In contrast to task-focused motives that are centered on achieving goals, this third set of motives is task-centered, but more concerned about carrying out a process than accomplishing specific goals. These processes might be evangelizing the unreached, being present among non-believers, helping the poor, or ministering to the abused. The focus is on performing work that the church and missionary believe is important rather than strategically accomplishing specific goals. Phrases associated with these motives include

"holistic ministry," "being vs. doing," "God's Word does not return void," "disaster relief," and "social justice."

When the focus is on the process, missionaries and churches enter into relationships so that missionaries can use the church's money to do work that the church believes in. Churches act as a charity, providing funds for a worthy cause, and missionaries act as aid workers, spending the money in ways that respond to people's long-term or short-term needs. One of the main concerns of church leaders is the trustworthiness of the missionaries. Will they do what they say they are going to do?

This set of motives was the least represented among our sample. In fact, two church leaders specifically mentioned that their churches moved away from a process-focus (where they sent money to a denominational body without relationship or oversight) toward a goal-focus. And while one church leader preferred the process-centered approach to church/missionary relationships, none of the missionaries we interviewed did.

**Financial Support as an Expression of Identity.** Churches with process-focused motives tend to give as an expression of what they believe themselves to be, typically Christians who are concerned about the poor, the suffering, or the unreached. The church's leadership may not have expectations for the missionary (or missions project) to make a lasting change in the lives of the recipients; they may simply be content with choosing from denominational "catalogs" of projects. In contrast to churches with goal-focused motives, process-motivated congregations are not advocating for certain fields to be reached or for their own family members to be supported. One missions leader, who has been the missions chair for 10 years at his church, said he simply picked projects based

on his own criteria that he believed reflected the values of the church. Describing the engagement of the missions committee members in specific ministries of their missionaries, he said:

I forward missionary reports to members and I have yet to hear anything from the committee except, "I didn't read it." So this is a one-way thing most of the time. Pretty much my biggest job is rounding them all up on Sunday to come to the meeting. Never had any feedback, not in 10 years except "Good program!"

Yet it is essential that the projects chosen correspond to the identity of the church, whether it be a denominational identity or an identity based on social involvement. One missions pastor said that they supported missionaries who did evangelism, church planting, and leadership training, but these missionaries generally did not get presented to the church during the worship services when they were on home assignment. Rather, missionaries involved in humanitarian projects such as refugee work or economic development were the ones presented to the church. This is because the church members would have a "hard time" relating to or being motivated by ministries that were more spiritually focused.

A notable difference between the process-focused churches and the goal-focused churches concerns missionary exit strategies. Process-motivated churches may prefer to donate indefinitely to a humanitarian program, an approach that takes little effort. This is in contrast to goal-motivated churches which may require regular evaluations and a specific exit plan for the missionaries.

**Communication to Show Concern for the Needy.** Process-focused motives, such as the pastor in the previous paragraph, lead to an

emphasis on communicating that the church is concerned about the poor, needy, suffering, and unreached. From a social identity perspective (Hogg 2006; Hogg & Terry 2000), this can make the church more attractive to the unchurched who want to be identified as people who have these same concerns. Thus by communicating to worship service attenders that the church is involved in such ministries, people are motivated to more closely identify with the church.

### ***Summary of the Three Sets of Motives behind Missionary-Church Relationships.***

In a series of interviews with missionaries and mission leaders we asked, "What motivates churches and missionaries to enter into relationships? What expectations do missionaries and churches have for each other?" The patterns that we saw indicate that church leaders and missionaries have various motives, including high quality relationships, accomplishing goals, and supporting causes. Neither missionaries nor church leaders balance these three approaches equally; they tend to be motivated by one more than by the others, yet the other two are often present to some degree. In addition, as churches and missionaries evolve, churches and their missionaries may no longer have the same motivations for being in relationship, leading to tensions that sometimes lead to a termination of the relationship.

Table 2: Characteristics of Three Types of Motives for Missionary-Church relationships

|                        | Category of Motivation |                             |                                 |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                        | Relationship-Focused   | Task-Focused: Goal-Centered | Task-Focused: Process-Centered  |
| Metaphor               | Family                 | Business                    | Charity Work                    |
| Role of the Church     | Parent                 | Employer                    | Fund Raiser                     |
| Role of the Missionary | Child                  | Employee                    | Aid Worker                      |
| Finances               | Parental Support       | A Contract                  | Identity Expression             |
| Communication          | Family Dialogue        | Accountability and Fit      | Expression of Concern for Needy |
| Short-Term Missions    | Gifts and Visiting     | Vision Fulfillment          | None or Virtue Signaling        |

### Discussion

In this grounded theory study we interviewed missionaries and missions leaders to understand what motivates churches and missionaries to enter into relationships, stay in relationships, and occasionally withdraw from relationships. This has led to the "Multiple Motive Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships" which states that:

*Churches and missionaries have multiple motives for entering into and maintaining relations. These motives can be broadly categorized as either relationship-focused motives or task-focused motives. Furthermore, the task-focused motives can either be centered on specific goals shared by churches and missionaries (e.g., starting a reproducing church among a specific people group) or on specific processes (e.g., evangelism or feeding the poor).*

All of these motives may be present in missionaries and churches to varying degrees, and can be shared to varying extents. The more likely that these motivations are perceived to be shared, the more missionaries and churches are likely to enter into a relationship and maintain it. The degree to which churches and missionaries have motives that are incongruent increases the likelihood of terminating the relationship.

### Relationships and goals

The motivation to have a close missionary-church relationship was described by all missionaries and all church leaders interviewed, but with various levels of intensity. Humans tend to be innately motivated to have high quality relationships with others (Ryan & Deci 2000). Supporting missionaries seems to be a productive arena for experiencing such relationships.

Goal motivations need not be seen as oppositional to relationships, or as subservient to them. In fact, goal setting is a very effective tool in a variety of ministry

settings when done appropriately (Dunaetz 2013).

Short term mission trips may also fit both relational and goal motivations. Church members in process-motivated churches may be motivated to go on mission trips as a way of expressing their values and communicating to others what type of person they are. Virtue signaling (Bulbulia & Schjoedt 2010) typically involves costly behavior (such as going to a poor, far-away country) to convincingly demonstrate one's commitment to a set of values. The "effectiveness" of these trips may be of little concern, as may be the cultural relevancy of whatever ministries are performed during the trip. Such mission trips may seem like simple feel-good activism.

### ***Theological Reflection***

It appears that all three motives are congruent with biblical values. Certainly the importance of loving one another and experiencing healthy relationships (e.g., John 13:34-35) is of prime importance for both missionaries and churches because love is at the center of the Gospel (John 3:16, I Cor. 13, I John 4:7-9). Similarly, the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20, John 20:21, Acts 1:8) emphasizes the need to make disciples of all nations, which can best be achieved by focusing on one specific group of people at a time, a very specific goal. The apostle Paul was especially motivated to by the goal of planting churches where none existed (I Cor. 3:5-9, Rom. 15:17-21). Moreover, the believer is entrusted with several ongoing processes that do not necessarily lead to achieving specific goals, such as living a life of service, walking humbly with God, and responding to the needs of the poor without partiality (e.g., Micah 6:8, Mark 9:35, James 1:27-2:8). Both relationship-focused motives and task-focused motives (including those centered on either specific goals or generally process)

correspond to how God calls his people to serve him.

From a theological perspective, the motives of missionaries and churches can lead to several problems when there is an overemphasis on one set of motives. First, a set of motives, when overemphasized, can prevent either churches or missionaries from doing all that God asks of them. The concept that "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22, NIV) indicates that when our desire is to appear righteous, there is a possibility of missing out on God's will. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul devalues various task-focused behaviors that are not rooted in love, a temptation for all churches and missionaries who tend to have task-centered motives, especially those that are goal oriented. Similarly, Christ warns against an overemphasis on process-centered, task-focused motives: "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Mark 8:36, NIV).

A second realm of difficulties can arise as we consider that motives themselves are motivated, that is, they have underlying motives. If one's underlying motive for having either task or relationship-focused goals is counter to God's purposes, destructive behaviors may result. If a missionary or a church member is more concerned about his or her own interests (e.g., a missionary's concern about his or her own reputation, or a church member's desire to use short-term missions as a sort of tourism), pious sounding task and relationship motives concerning the church/missionary relationship may be empty and even counterproductive to the spread of the gospel.

### ***Missiological Implications***

This study has several missiological implications for both missionaries and churches. The first implication is that both missionaries and churches need to be aware



of the wide range of motives that each may have for wanting to enter into or for maintaining a church/missionary relationship. By being aware of the values that motivate the other party, each may respond to the other's expectations more clearly. If a missionary has a good understanding of the degree to which a church is relationship motivated and task motivated, the missionary can respond, out of love, in a way that best meets the church's expectations. For example, if the church is especially relationship motivated, the missionary may want to include more information about his or her family in correspondence with the church and organize home assignments so that the entire family can visit the church several weekends. If a church is especially focused on goal accomplishment, missionaries can use this as a form of accountability to stay focused on the task to which they believe God has called them, using the annual reports as a time of reflection and evaluation to discern any changes that they should make in the ministry.

Similarly, if churches can better understand what motivates each of their missionaries, they can better support and encourage them. If a missionary is especially task-motivated with a focus on a specific process, the church can publicly recognize the work the missionary is doing and emphasize its importance when the missionary visits the church. Task-motivated missionaries who are focused on specific goals may greatly appreciate a church's willingness to only send a short-term team which would strategically contribute to accomplishing the missionary's ministry goals.

A second implication concerns the changing nature of motives. Before moving into a new culture, missionaries may possess a naïve understanding of their own motives and ministry goals. Experience and a deeper

understanding of the people with whom they work may allow them to develop more sensitive or realistic expectations for their ministry. Churches will benefit from a posture of openness toward these changing motives. Similarly, missionaries will benefit from understanding how the changing motives of their partnering churches. A church formerly motivated by relationships may hire a missions pastor who is very goal oriented and expects the missionaries to be accountable for what they accomplish. In this case, the missionary would benefit from adapting to such changes in leadership by re-envisioning their relationship to the church in ways that correspond to the new expectations. God may be using these changes in both the missionary and the church as a tool to direct both the missionary and church in new directions.

### *Suggestions for Further Research*

The Multiple Motive Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships posits that churches and missionaries have multiple motives for entering and maintaining relationships with each other. These motives may be either relationship-focused or task-focused (with an emphasis on either goals or processes). Understanding these motives enables missionaries and churches to better understand one another and to respond to each other's expectations. This raises a number of important questions that should be the subject of future research. To what degree are a church's motives stable across time? What factors, other than leadership, influence these motives? The size of the church? The theology of the church? Similarly, are a church's motives consistent across missionaries, or do their motives for being in a relationship depend on the missionary? Concerning missionaries, what personality traits enable missionaries to adapt to various and varying expectations of churches? Under what conditions are such a

wide range of expectations for missionaries beneficial or detrimental to the well-being of their family and to the ministry to which God has called them?

### References Cited

- Beals P (1995) *A People for His Name, A Church-Based Missions Strategy*, (rev. ed.) Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Press.
- Bulbulia J and Schjoedt U (2010) Religious culture and cooperative prediction under risk: Perspectives from social neuroscience. *Religion, Economy, and Cooperation* 49: 35-60.
- Camp B (1995) A Theological Examination of the Two-Structure Theory. *Missiology* 23(2): 197.
- Chapin J (1998) The Sender: Local Church and Mission Agency-What's the Best Relationship. *Mission Frontiers* (January-February 1998). Accessed April 4, 2018 from <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-sender>.
- Clark M and Mills J (1979) Interpersonal Attraction in Exchange and Communal Relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37(1): 12-24.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2011) A Theory of Communal (and Exchange) Relationships. In Van Lange P, Kruglanski A and Higgins E (eds.) *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, Los Angeles, CA: Sage, pp. 232-250.
- Corbin J and Strauss A (2015) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cropanzano R and Mitchell M (2005) Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review. *Journal of Management* 31(6): 874-900.
- Cuertton C (1983) "Candidate fit: A criterion related model." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 11(3): 196-202.
- Dunaetz D (2013) Goals and accountability for ministry effectiveness: Insights from psychological science. *Dharma Deepika: A South Asian Journal of Missiological Research* 17(1): 66-79.
- Dunaetz, D (2017) A Missionary's Relationship to Sending Churches: Communal and Exchange Dimensions. In Hart G, Little C and Wan J (eds.) *Churches on Mission: God's Grace Abounding to the Nations*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Press, pp. 303-323.
- Ferguson L (1983) Candidate selection criteria: a survey. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 11(3): 243-250.
- Glaser A (2001) *The Grounded Theory Perspective: Conceptualization Contrasted with Description*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Guder D, et al. (1998) *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- Hogg M (2006) Social identity theory. In Burke P (ed.), *Contemporary social psychological theories*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 111-136.
- Hogg M and Terry, D (2000) Social identity and self-categorization processes in organizational contexts. *Academy of Management Review* 25(1): 121-140.
- Horner D (2011) *When Missions Shapes the Mission: You and Your Church Can Reach the World*. Nashville: B&H.
- Kel O (2013) *Missionary Care*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Press.
- Kelley H, Holmes J, Kerr N, Reis H, Rusbult C and Van Lange P (2003) *An Atlas of Interpersonal Situations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kelley H and Thibaut J (1978). *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kliewer D (1983) Missionary program evaluation: An assessment strategy. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 2(4): 38-44.
- Lancaster A (2016) *A strategy for sending missionaries from The Village Church in Dallas-Ft. Worth* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Louisville, KY.
- Liew I (2017) *Churches and Missions Agencies Together: A Relational Model For Partnership Practice*. Condeo Press.
- McClelland D (1984) *Motives, personality, and society: Selected papers*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.
- Merriam S and Tisdell E (2016) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Metcalf S (1993) When Local Churches Act Like Agencies. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 29(2): 142-149.
- Patton M (2002) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pirollo N (1991) *Serving as Senders: How to Care for Your Missionaries While They Are Preparing to Go, While They Are on the Field, When They Return Home*. San Diego, CA: Emmaus Road.
- Rusbult C (1980) Commitment and Satisfaction in Romantic Associations: A Test of the Investment Model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 16(2): 172-186.
- Rusbult C, Agnew C, and Arriaga X (2011) The Investment Model of Commitment Processes. In Van Lange P, Kruglanski A and Higgins E (eds). *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 218-231.
- Rusbult C and Farrell D (1983) A Longitudinal Test of the Investment Model: The Impact on Job Satisfaction, Job Commitment, and Turnover of Variations in Rewards, Costs, Alternatives, and Investments. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 68(3): 429-438.

Ryan R and Deci E (2000) Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist* 55(1): 68-78.

Smither E (2017) When the Church was the Mission Organization: Rethinking Winter's Two Structures of Redemption Paradigm," In Hart G, Little C and Wang J (eds) *Churches on Mission: God's Grace Abound to the Nations*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Press, pp. 25-46.

Strauss J and Corbin A (1998) *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.