

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

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A CHURCH MISSIONARY PROGRAM (Continued)

5. The missionary conference

One of the most popular means for stirring up missionary interest in a Church is the missionary conference. Here in a period of a few days the Church centers its whole attention on missions. Such a concentrated effort is usually productive, whether in the raising of the Church's missionary budget or in getting young people to volunteer for missionary service. But much of the value of the conference depends on the understanding and care with which you make the plans and on your choice of speakers.

Where only one mission is concerned, as in many of the denominational churches, the Church's part in the planning is fairly simple.

Since the mission has had experience in such things, after you agree on the date you can allow it to take charge. Of course there will have to be consultation about the details, but the mission will recommend the over-all plan with the selection of speakers. To help carry out the plan is the responsibility of the Church.

But where several missions are to be represented, the whole responsibility rests on the Church. And it is such conferences that are the most common. They are held even in many denominational churches. We shall give rather extended treatment to this type because its problems will include also the ones you will find in the other.

a. In planning a missionary conference, the first thing is to settle on a time for it.

There is no particular time of year that is always better than any other time. Most churches avoid the summer months, but spring, fall and even winter months are commonly used. The Christmas season is avoided, but Easter time is popular. Often the Church plans to have the conference near the beginning or end of its fiscal year, with an eye on the budget.

The length of time for the conference is a knotty problem. Local conditions have much to do with it. The choice usually runs from three days to a week. Very few churches find it profitable

to run over a week. Sometimes the conference begins with a Sunday and runs through the mid-week prayer meeting. At other times it begins with the mid-week prayer meeting and ends with the Sunday meetings. Another variation has been adopted where it has been difficult to get people out on week nights. A missionary month has been set aside, with missionary speakers at each Sunday and mid-week service during the month. This plan does not have the concentrated impact of the other, but it may reach more people and does sustain the emphasis over a longer period.

b. Local conditions will determine how many and what services you can best use. The plan that works well in one place may not be at all suitable for another. Consider the following:

(1) Most people will attend the regular services. This means that you will have your largest services at the regular Sunday meeting times, with perhaps the second largest at the mid-week prayer meeting hour. People are used to going to Church at these times, and even an exceptionally good speaker may not draw them out at any other time.

(2) The evening services, except on Sunday, will be better attended than afternoon or morning meetings. This doesn't mean that you can't hold profitable daytime meetings in some places. There are people who can and will arrange their work so as to be free to attend such meetings, and of course they are likely to be the ones most deeply interested. But in any case the attendance will be smaller than at night.

(3) Sunday afternoon meetings are often poorly attended in cities, where there are many other attractions. This is something that is very unpredictable. Sometimes Sunday afternoon meetings are very well attended and very profitable.

(4) A word of warning about meetings held at times not in the usual Church schedule. Don't make them long! Some people don't mind, but many others do. They won't come out night after night if they think the meetings are too prolonged. Better to have them wish they were longer than feel that they are too long.

(5) Include the Sunday School, Young People's Society, Women's Society and any other Church organizations in your plans. The Women's Society may have to move its meeting up a week, but it is usually glad to do so. The Sunday School may want a few words from a missionary in its opening assembly, or to have missionaries speak to the individual classes or groups of classes.

(6) Usable types of meetings

(a) The Sunday morning service usually follows the regular form, except that a missionary is in the pulpit with a missionary message. The Sunday evening meeting is often varied.

(b) Where more than one missionary is available for a meeting, you may give one of them part of the time to show pictures, while the other follows with a message. Or vice versa.

(c) Sometimes it is good to follow a talk with a question period, when the audience is invited to ask the speaker questions. This usually works best in the smaller meetings. Sometimes it is hard to get the people started asking. Let them know ahead of time that there will be such a period, so they can get set for it. And be prepared to get the ball rolling by asking questions yourself.

(d) Round table or panel discussions are often very valuable if several missionaries are present. It takes a capable and well-informed leader to handle them properly, though.

In the one, the missionaries discuss one or more problems among themselves, with the audience listening in. The audience, however, may also be allowed to interject questions if it wants to.

In the other, the questions come from the audience and are referred to one or another of the missionaries on the panel for answer. If the leader or one of the others is not satisfied with an answer, he may give another point of view or add to the answer.

Sometimes leaders "plant" questions in the audience to be asked at the proper time. While this is not always objectionable, there are many who dislike its artificiality. In most cases the "planted" questions are so stereotyped that it is obvious that they didn't originate with the person asking them. With young people keenly interested in missions these discussion periods are very popular.

(e) You ought to plan for special services for the children, and sometimes for the young people. Costumes, curios, stories and songs interest the children. Pictures are good if they are adapted to the children, though this is not usually the case. For the young people you may want to plan the meeting in connection with a picnic or a banquet. Or if there is a Saturday night youth rally, it can be made a missionary rally.

(f) Don't overlook the possibility that one or more of the missionary speakers might be used in the local school or in some civic group. It calls for a speaker with tact and judgment, but in this way you are spreading the blessing beyond your own Church. Also, it is good publicity for your meetings.

~ end of chapter 24 ~
