



# STUDENT MISSIONAL PIPELINE

*A template  
for the  
church.*



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*Every church.  
Every nation.*



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# Develop A Student Missional Pipeline in Your Church

by George Siler

## IT STARTS WITH A 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?

- Children who know Jesus, are grounded in the Scriptures, and understand what it means to serve others for the sake of Christ and the gospel.
- Middle schoolers who have experienced the gospel and begun to share their faith in Jesus with unbelievers.
- Older youth who think like a missionary in their context and put their faith to work through prayer, evangelism, and discipling others.
- Young adults who make key decisions in life in the context of God's mission and are ready to engage cultures for the sake of Christ.



Envision year after year of people sent out from your church to reach lost peoples with the gospel, help start churches, and serve God in careers and places all over the world! Such a vision requires some prerequisites or assumptions grounded in biblical truth.

## Why the pipeline analogy?

### ***Pipelines are deliberate.***

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?



### ***Pipelines are measurable.***

What comes out of a pipeline can be **assessed** and tracked. Success in ministry and missions is certainly more than numbers, but not less. We monitor and measure what we value, and something as important as your ministry's engagement in God's mission deserves such scrutiny. What missionaries has your church sent out over the last 10 years? What students have you seen launched into missional careers? What new churches or partnerships with missionary teams have resulted from your mission strategy?

### ***Pipelines are continuous.***

To serve their purpose, pipelines must be consistent and intact, and the same is true about a missional strategy. First, is everyone in leadership on board with the vision and plan? Second, is this something that can be sustained even when people in leadership come and go? The age-old problem in many churches is that of staff turnover and constantly changing philosophies, which result in a lack of **continuity**. If the rising generations in your church are going to catch the vision of their life on mission for God, they will need the whole church to pursue this consistently over a long term, even through transitions in leadership.



## **STEPS TO CREATING YOUR PIPELINE**

We offer a template, rather than a blueprint. The gospel and God's Word remain consistent, but every church is unique in its setting, members, giftings, and opportunities. What follows in this guide are five components of an intentional plan and structure that you can develop by using or modifying existing elements and adding new ones as needed.



1. Define core missional concepts and convictions
2. Identify the desired outcomes
3. Build a missional culture
4. Develop opportunities for learning and engagement
5. Establish missional milestones

## 1. Define your core convictions of missions.

The starting place of a pipeline is typically where raw materials are being gathered or processed. You may think that students are the beginning of your missional pipeline, but truly it is your theology. Before you add people and strategies into the mix, you need to be clear about what drives the process.

### ***What principles undergird your church and ministry?***

Adopting a pipeline approach requires the conviction that the Great Commission applies to every church and all believers. It requires biblically sound concepts of evangelism, discipleship, and missions in the church. For instance, the International Mission Board's *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."<sup>1</sup>

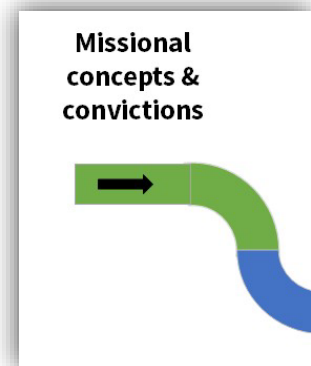
### ***Consider these diagnostic questions:***

- **What is the mission of the church?**

Not everything a church or ministry does can be defined as missions. 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.

- **Is missions an extracurricular activity in your ministry?**

Missions is not an optional activity, but part of our identity as followers of Christ. As Ed



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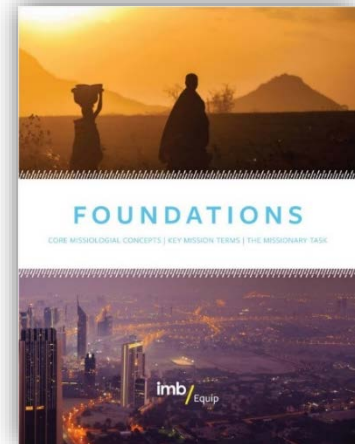
<sup>1</sup> IMB shares this and other key definitions at [imb.org/beliefs-key-terms](http://imb.org/beliefs-key-terms). The *Foundations* document is available at [store.imb.org](http://store.imb.org).

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Stetzer puts it, “Missional is a way of being that leads to a way of acting.”<sup>2</sup> It 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. No ministry 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.

- **How do you define key terms such as gospel, evangelism and discipleship?**

These words may be used often in your ministry but remain vague and undecided. IMB has articulated a list of missional terms and concepts on its website at [imb.org/beliefs-key-terms](http://imb.org/beliefs-key-terms). For a more extensive treatment, see the *Foundations* document released in 2018 and available at [store.imb.org](http://store.imb.org).



- **What if the Great Commission become the organizing feature of your church?**

How does it change things for you and your church members to think like a missionary? Your focus naturally turns outward rather than inward. Your evangelism is more about going to others rather than waiting for them to come to you. Your approach to discipleship is more about developing obedience than just gaining knowledge. “When a church embraces the call to mission...everything is shaped and directed toward the missional cause of our missional God. Instead of trying to fit God into our lives, missional Christianity asks where our lives fit into God’s mission.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***The mission applies to all next generation ministries.***

Does it surprise you that all the age group ministries of the church need to be founded on core missiological convictions? For instance, do you really believe that every part of the Bible is part of a grand narrative with Jesus and His mission at the center? If so, how should that affect the way you tell Bible stories? Mission trips are a valid part of your ministry, but will they be the only way you engage in the mission? Do you really believe that God has called us to pray for unreached peoples and for Christ to be made known to the nations? Addressing questions like these can get you on the

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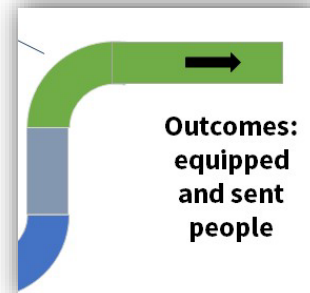
<sup>2</sup> Ed Stetzer, “Developing Missional Churches for the Great Commission, Part One,” *ChristianityToday.com*, 4/18/11, [www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2011/april/developing-missional-churches-for-great-commission-part-one.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2011/april/developing-missional-churches-for-great-commission-part-one.html).

<sup>3</sup> Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch, *The Faith of Leap: Embracing a Theology of Risk, Adventure, and Courage* (Baker Books: Grand Rapid, MI. 2011), p. 178.

right track with the missional pipeline in your church?

## 2. Identify the desired outcomes in your people.

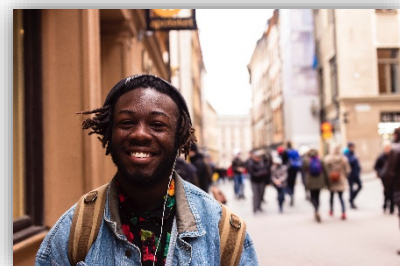
A pipeline not only has a direction but also an end product. This step is about results: what do you want to “deliver” or accomplish? Regarding the mission, think in terms of people, equipped and sent. Only the Holy Spirit fully knows what a person will need to fulfill his or her calling, but your church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



### *Who will you send and what will they be like?*

Envision students and young adults 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?



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?

### ***What will be the pathways and destinations for your sent ones?***

Don't remain ambiguous here. Students have very specific choices to make regarding education, jobs, and future places to live. Their possibilities as guided by the Holy Spirit will always be more than you can offer, but consider how the Spirit may be leading your church and ministry to identify particular missional opportunities to promote. For instance, could some of your young adults join a church start in another city and be its foundational workers and leaders? Could some become missionaries with IMB, such as in the 2-year Journeyman program, or start the path to long-term service with IMB? Learn about these pathways at [imb.org/go](http://imb.org/go).

IMB offers a series of "Roadmaps" that are guides for students to consider how to pursue college majors and careers with the idea of using them to serve overseas on mission. These guides are available in print and for download at [imb.org/students/guides-resources](http://imb.org/students/guides-resources).



### **3. Build a missional culture in your church.**

Pipelines need pressure to have flow and output. In terms of people and the mission, think of this as your church's atmosphere or culture—that which

permeates all you say and do in your ministry. **Your culture will drive things even more than your programs and planned opportunities.**



Simply put, culture is the shared values of a group, but consider a deeper understanding: culture is "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."<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>4</sup> 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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### ***Culture starts with a leader but doesn't end there.***

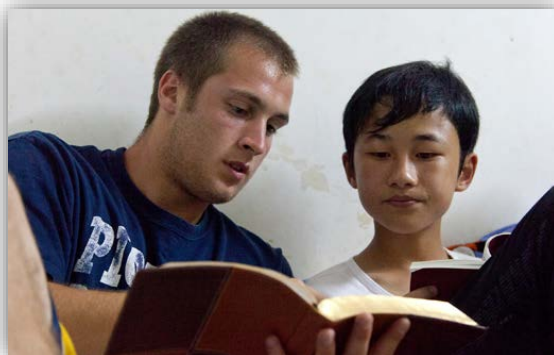
Consider the culture of a youth ministry. In many churches it has taken on the qualities of the key leader, emulating that person's passions and interests. In recent years, however, even a charismatic leader's influence is no match for the huge impact of secular culture in social media, entertainment, and education on youth. In response, church culture must become more than one person's convictions, but a collective of people representing a united front who own the vision.

More and more the identities of churches and their ministries will be counter-cultural in offering a biblical world view. Will that viewpoint find most of its expression in exclusivity and defensiveness, or it will it be driven by the call of God to join His mission in the world?

### ***Culture is both talk and walk.***

The challenge in building a missional culture is to pair stated values with real actions—both are needed. Consider another set of diagnostic questions:

- How much do you we talk about the mission of God and your church's role in it?
- Does what you say about missions match with your actual priorities in your ministries and programs?
- Do you 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 your measures of success, and do they match with your 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.

- **Speak often of “This is who we are.”** Sports teams do this and have far less a claim on their members' lives. Explain often what it means to be the people of God. Weave the concepts of the Great Commission into every expression of your ministry.
- **Develop catch phrases as reminders of the mission.** How might a constant refrain of “we send people” began to permeate among your people and translate into children reaching out to their lost family members, youth seeing themselves as missionaries in their schools and neighborhoods, students choosing to attend a particular college with ministry in mind, and young adults leveraging their jobs to become marketplace evangelists.
- **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 and outside the church who characterize a life on mission. Help students see the diverse possibilities of God’s calling.
- **Prioritize missions in practical and observable ways.** Give it a prime consideration in your budget, as a regular element in worship services, and in your calendar of activities.
- **Celebrate missional accomplishments and milestones.** This will be discussed more as a separate point, but part of culture is in what you praise and appreciate. Make baptisms a big deal. Rejoice in witnessing opportunities. Pray over every person going to serve on mission.
- **Develop annual traditions and entry points of missions involvement.** Give every age group a way to participate in mission offerings, mission studies, prayer emphases, and mission fairs.

### *Living up to expectations.*

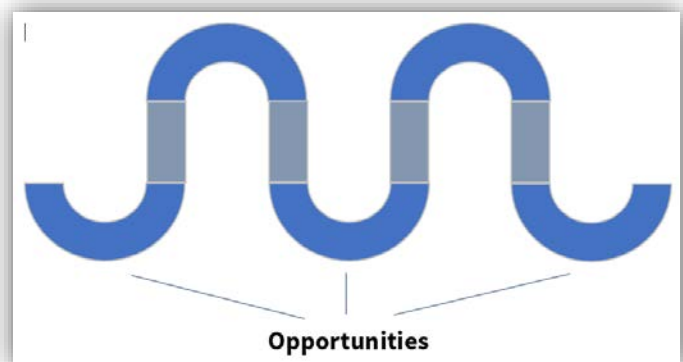
To return to a sports team analogy, many successful programs have developed standards of excellence that are carried out in every dimension, such as in practice sessions, weight training, team nutrition, and pre-game activities. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of a missional culture is **expectation**. 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 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 affect 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 rising generations in missions.

### ***The indispensable ingredient: discipleship***

Missions and discipleship are intended to be inseparable. Review the Great Commission; Jesus wove together the commands of going, making disciples, teaching, and baptizing. The discipleship of children and youth must be more than simply imparting information,



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but also about developing obedience. A mission trip should not be the first place a student or other church member encounters the demands of true discipleship and the necessity of personal evangelism.

### ***Start with what you have.***

Review 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.

### ***Consider what you might need to stop doing.***

It might come as a surprise that stopping something you are doing may be just as important as starting something new. Some mission trips may not be effective, especially in terms of truly accomplishing the mission. The pipeline concept does not necessitate you do more things, but that you do needful things.

### ***Educate the rising generations.***

We teach about what we really value. Mission education is a crucial element many churches have ignored or forgotten. Children and youth are raised up without knowing the grand biblical narrative, their Christian heritage, the priority of missions in our denomination, and 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 cross-cultural scavenger hunts, encounters with missionaries, and refugee simulations.

### ***Give them chances to go and do.***

Some church ministries are "all practice and no game." There is no substitute for experience, and "going" opportunities continue to be a prime way to give people eye-opening, life-changing encounters 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

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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 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



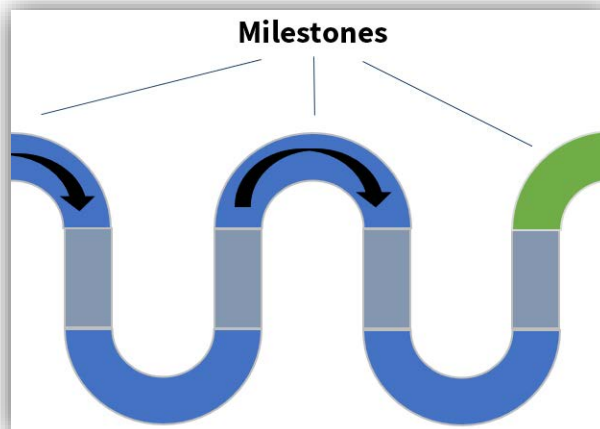
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seeks to encourage families and young people toward spiritual maturity. The missional pipeline approach simply adds the outward focus of a life beyond self in obedience to God.

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.

***Be creative!***

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



- **For children:**
  - Memorize the Great Commission passages
  - 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
  - Complete an evangelism training course
  - Participate in a mission trip away from home
- **For high school youth**
  - Secure a passport
  - Be discipled by a mentor
  - Engage in a prayer walk for unreached people
  - Lead an outreach Bible study group for other youth
  - 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

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## ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Change your scorecard, as Rick Warren has long urged, from seating capacity to sending.
- Ideally, the pastor and senior leadership should be the champions of missional culture and convictions, but even if not, age group leaders can do much to bring missions to the fore of their ministry. Learn as a servant leader to “lead from below.”
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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?

*IMB is ready to assist you and your church in taking your next steps in missions.*

- Student website: [imb.org/students](http://imb.org/students)
- Questions? Email [info@imb.org](mailto:info@imb.org)