

Shoestring Valley Community Church Sending Guidelines

We believe that God has called the local church to send workers to all nations. While we are thankful for mission agencies and work hand-in-hand with them, we endeavor as the body of Christ to be closely involved in the preparation and support of those we partner with and send.

Recognizing that there will always be more needs than we can fill, we have set priorities in our mission policy to help us focus our efforts in missions strategically. We would like to introduce you to how we prioritize supporting the missions opportunities presented to us, the ways we would like to see you preparing for cross-cultural ministry, and what it would look like to partner together in ministry. We have a two-fold mission strategy: mobilization and global evangelization. Priority is given to SVCC members who will be ministering to those who have the least access to the gospel (unreached peoples), those involved in church planting and equipping nationals, and to missions mobilization.

What does it mean to be sent by or partner with Shoestring Valley Community Church?

To partner with or be sent by SVCC means that we recognize, affirm, and endorse you being sent into cross-cultural service and we commit to coach you, encourage you, support you, and provide grace-filled accountability. In order for us to do this in good conscience, there is a process. While we do not want to put people through “hoops,” nor be overly intrusive and legalistic, we do desire to be wise and thorough.

As we consider sending or partnering with people, there are four areas that will come into play: 1)Theological, 2) Missiological, 3) Personal, and 4) Organizational.

**Theological**

Theology is vitally important in determining if someone should be sent into cross-cultural service. The reasons are many, including:

* Many of the countries least reached by the gospel are that way for a reason; they are difficult, spiritually dark places. Some believers, who may be quite strong in their faith in their home culture, find their faith challenged in ways they have never experienced. It is not unheard of to have strong believers go to the field and have a crisis of faith, or lose their faith all together. As we send you, we must know that your faith in the gospel is secure and that you will not be easily moved from Christ.
* The focus of missions is the gospel – the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is our aim that we send people who love the gospel, live the gospel, and preach the gospel. It is vital that those hearing the gospel from those we partner with or send hear a gospel that is complete and accurate. It would bring us great sadness, as well as dishonor our Lord, if one sent from SVCC teaches things that are not Biblically correct.

Criteria that SVCC looks for in this area:

* A working knowledge and understanding of the key doctrines of the Christian faith.
* “Signing off” on Shoestring Valley Community Church’s statement of faith.
* A biblical understanding of the authority and responsibility of the local church.
* Completion of the New Member Class if you are attending SVCC.
* The SVCC leadership agree that you believe, understand, and can communicate gospel truth.

**Missiological**

What is “Missions?”

There are many things that are called “missions.” While we support and encourage many of them, we do think it is important to have clarity in the work that we are doing. Therefore, we do want to have a working definition of “missions” that helps bring focus to the task. As we understand it, “missions” is:

God, through his church, sending his servants into the world as witnesses of the gospel, to proclaim and demonstrate the person and work of Jesus Christ, making disciples who will obey all that Jesus has commanded (Matthew 9:35-38, 24:14, 28:19-20; Luke 10:25-27, 24:45-47; John 20:21; Romans 15:20-21).

What about Church-Planting?

We believe that if we are doing the above, new communities of worship (churches) should and will be started. It should be the goal of our missions efforts.

NOTE: When we say “churches” we are not referring to buildings. We are referring to disciples of Jesus living out the gospel together in community.

The End Goal

The end goal of missions is equally important. While there are many great things accomplished in missions, the end goal should be God’s glory; that he might be made famous among all peoples, that there might be worshippers from among all nations! (Psalm 67; Isaiah 43:6-7; Habakkuk 2:14; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 4:11; Revelation 5:9- 14; 7:9-10)

The SVCC’s Core Values in Missions

While we want to be involved in many things, we do not have unlimited resources, time, or energy. Therefore, it is vital that we identify the priorities to which God has called us. Our core values in missions help determine what those priorities are, and therefore what we support financially and what we desire SVCC workers to be involved in. These values are not a check-list per se, but important principles that we believe determine the “success” of church planting efforts.

* Scripturally Based – The strategies and methods we employ should be consistent with Scripture. We want to see the timeless truths of Scripture flowing through the cultural realities of our day.
* Culturally Indigenous – We believe that a community of believers should reflect the culture in which they exist in a way that is true to Scripture and relevant to the surrounding community. For example, the music, teaching style, place of meeting, and organizational structure should mirror local ways of doing things.
* Self-Sustaining – As part of indigenous church planting, we seek to help plant churches that are “sustainable.” In other words, ministry staff, finances for local church pastors, and ministry training should be primarily developed “in-country” rather than from abroad. When church plants are dependent on foreign finances and personnel, oftentimes unhealthy dependence occurs, local initiative is stifled, and subsidized believers are viewed with suspicion by their own community.
* Working Holistically – We believe that a life in Christ includes the totality of who we are as people both individually and collectively. Therefore, we do not consider some parts of our lives as sacred, while other parts secular. Rather, the whole of our lives is an offering to God in worship and an instrument for his redemptive work.
* An Emphasis on the Unreached – Thanks to the efforts of countless believers through the centuries, much of the world has ready access to the gospel. Locally led churches are growing, Christian books and music are available, and the Bible is available in local languages. While we feel compelled to work in all countries, our preeminent desire is to work where there is little or no witness of the gospel. These places in our world are commonly referred to as “unreached.” Generally, this includes North Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Tent-making and Business as Mission

We believe in SVCC workers raising their support. Given current realities, however, we do want to encourage workers to consider alternate sources of funding as well. Consider the following:

* Many of the least-reached countries are not open to “traditional” donor-supported missionaries. In the countries that are, donor-supported workers are often viewed with suspicion and often have a very difficult time with their identity (“Why are you here? Where does your money come from?)

For these reasons and others, we encourage people to consider “tent-making” and business as missions. These two strategies are proving to be some of the most effective means of living and working in least-reached countries.

Criteria SVCC looks for in this area include:

* A clear and evident calling to cross-cultural service.
* “Heart” affirmation of SVCC’s Core Values in Missions.
* Completion of the Perspectives class or similar missions training.
* Identification of a trade or vocation that could transfer into your given county.

**Personal**

In order for us to learn more about your personal history, your character, and your preparations for cross-cultural ministry, please complete [SVCC’s Application for Long Term Missionary Support](http://1c675a61b06d5523f885-ef54aee47dafd794ec6d08f83a2b4ef6.r34.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/s/0e3082183_1396649763_svcc-application-for-long-term-missonary-support-final-4-4-14.pdf). (Requires Adobe Reader)

Criteria SVCC looks for in the area of your character include:

* At a minimum, deacon qualifications must be met (1Timothy 3:8-13).
* Must be attending SVCC for at least two years or consistently attending another congregation.
* Participating in the life of SVCC (services, small groups, etc.).
* Marriage “check-up” done with one of SVCC’s elders before official endorsement.
* Ministry experience that is similar to what you will be doing overseas.
* Agreement that you should be sent by or partner with SVCC by those who know you best.

**Organizational**

In general, we encourage, and often require, people sent by SVCC to work with an established, reputable organization. There are many reasons for this, including:

* Organizations provide on-field support and accountability that SVCC cannot provide.
* Organizations have the experience, knowledge, and cultural understanding to help workers be the most effective.
* Organizations provide vital services that are difficult for the local church to provide (tax receipts, emergency evacuations, medical insurance, etc.).

There may be exceptions. In cases where the new worker is starting a business, working as a full-time tentmaker, or going into a country that he/she already has experience and a network of support, joining an organization may not be necessary. In our opinion, however, this is the exception rather than the rule.

What organizations does SVCC work with?

While we thank God for all Christian organizations, we are looking to partner with those who share our core values (see above). We have experience working with some (Frontiers, Wycliffe, World Venture, Mennonite Brethren), and look forward to working with many others!

What should a person look for in an organization?

Here are some important questions to ask when considering who to work with:

* What is the big picture vision of the organization as a whole?
* Do they affirm and espouse sound doctrine?
* Where in the world/with which people groups do they work?
* What is their view of the local church? Do they see sending missionaries as the church’s responsibility?
* How are decisions made? Are they made from a central office or on the field?
* How are leaders chosen and kept accountable?
* What is the administration fee taken from your support?
* What are the expectations of spouses and families?
* What are the expectations for how you will live on the field (like the people, in a compound, up to you, etc.)
* What is the organization’s reputation in the Church? Do people speak well of them?
* What do people who have served with the organization say about them?
* Have you taken or will you be able to take a “vision trip”?