

MISSIONS CONVENTION PLANNER

by Randy Hurst

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HOW TO PREPARE FOR A MISSIONS CONVENTION

by Randy Hurst

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Missions is at the very heart of the Church's purpose. Jesus said, "The field is the world." Missions is spreading the good news of Jesus and establishing His church at home and abroad. The whole church can and should be involved in the mission of reaching the lost.

God blesses churches that have a heart for missions. Studies compiled over many years confirm that churches holding missions conventions and other missions services throughout the year enjoy not only increased missions giving, but increased financial support and evangelism in their own churches as well.

A regular missions emphasis once a year, or preferably twice a year, will keep the missionary vision of the church before the people. With prayer and planning, a missions convention can be a dynamic means God uses to inspire, enlist, challenge and motivate the local church.

Each church, regardless of size, can have a missions convention. A church's first missions convention can be simple, with new features added in subsequent years. The convention will increasingly become a highlight of your church year.

PRAY

The first order of business in planning a missions convention should be prayer. Any effective activity for God's kingdom depends on our communication with Him. A constant attitude and habit of prayer seeks divine involvement. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide, inspire and unite the church in purpose. Goals, plans, and decisions should continually be presented to Him.

PLAN AHEAD

The date for your convention should be chosen well in advance. A year, or at least 6 months, will give you time for scheduling and planning essential details. Check your church, school, district and community calendars to ensure the convention won't conflict with events that would involve members of the congregation and lower the attendance and participation. Avoid scheduling the convention on a holiday when families are often out of town.

It might be helpful for you to change the time of year for your missions convention to get a particular speaker you want. Certain months in the spring and fall are prime times for missions conventions, and many speakers are already committed. If you can be flexible, it may help you to get the speaker you want. Shifting a missions emphasis may throw off the 12- or six-month faith promise commitments made at the previous convention, but it likely will not hurt the faith promise program.

If you plan to cooperate with other churches in the area in a combined or "round-robin" convention, early planning is all the more important to settle the dates.

Appoint a missions committee. People will take “ownership” of the missions convention and work for its success.

The size of the committee will depend upon the size of the church and its involvement in missions. There may be as few as two or three or as many as 10 to 12. Consider representation from various ministries of the church such as youth, children, music, women’s ministries, and men’s ministries.

At least one person on the committee should have good organizational skills. Other qualifications to consider include church membership, faithful attendance, a cooperative spirit and financial support of missions.

The senior pastor should be a member of the missions committee. Pastoral oversight is important for the committee to function well.

SUGGESTIONS

- If you have two conventions a year, and one is a week-long event, you might make the alternate emphasis just a weekend event. Some churches make their fall emphasis the longer one and have a shorter one in the spring.
- If you have speakers who are raising their monthly budgets, try to commit regular support to them, especially if you want them to return to your church. Missionary speakers have sometimes been taken advantage of, having worked hard in a convention without receiving any monthly support, even when others received support who were not even a part of the convention.
- Nothing is more effective than when a missionary communicates his or her calling and passion through preaching the Word. Some missionaries, especially those who work in specialized ministries, may not be strong public speakers but can be interviewed during a service. The pastor can ask questions that will be of interest to the congregation. Probably the best thing to ask a missionary to do is describe his call to missions in general or to the specific country where he or she works.
- Publications, videos, theme materials, decorations and missionary interviews are helpful, but for more than 86 years the primary means of communicating missions to people in our churches has been by missionaries in our pulpits. In surveys done of Assemblies of God missionaries both in 1985 and 1995, of 25 reasons given for how missionaries became convinced that God was directing their lives toward missions, the top two reasons were personal prayer and hearing missions sermons by a missionary. Along with eliciting prayer and giving for missions, the most important thing that can happen in a missions convention is when the Lord speaks to the heart of children, youth or adults concerning full-time missionary service.

ORDER MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

Each year the Assemblies of God selects a theme to promote missions awareness and a variety of items are produced for use in churches. These include a missions musical, choir

books, accompaniment DVDs, orchestration books, banners, bulletin covers and inserts, placemats, faith promise cards, offering envelopes, letterhead stationery, thank-you cards and an activity book for children. Also available are informational brochures that can help educate a congregation concerning Assemblies of God missions.

The Assemblies of God World Missions U.S. Relations Department has a variety of items available that will help make your convention more effective. If you haven't received the most recent catalog, call 417-862-3420 or view online at www.worldmissions.ag.org. Several items are available, including *Newsbreak*, a DVD magazine that reports on current missionary activity around the world, *WorldBeat* DVDs for youth, *go 360* DVDs for children and a PowerPoint presentation concerning the missions faith promise. Other convention items include banners, posters, bulletin covers, placemats, lapel pins, informational and educational brochures, and "True Story" brochures.

A missions musical is produced every year that focuses on the annual missions theme and can be presented in missions banquets and services by a live choir, or as a video presentation, or both. The musicals are also designed to utilize single songs that can be performed individually.

SET GOALS

Decide in advance specific goals you want your convention to accomplish. Is your goal to increase the amount committed to the missionaries you currently support? Do you want to make commitments to missionaries not on your list or to a certain number of new missionaries and projects?

Try to set goals that are challenging, but attainable. Organize your convention around them and try to reach all the goals you set.

PROMOTE

To create interest and support, involve your congregation in the preparation and promotion of the convention. Communicate missions whenever possible and emphasize the individual's responsibility to winning the lost.

Pastors, deacons, and missions committee members can bring their faith promises forward before the congregation is asked to fill out cards. Church leadership can set the example for making faith promises.

It is essential that in the weeks prior to the convention the pastor educates, or reeducates, the congregation concerning missions faith promises. Faith Promise Sunday is not the best time to educate people. It is the time to motivate them and call them to commitment. Thought and prayer concerning missions faith promises should take place before Faith Promise Sunday. Faith promises can be promoted in several ways during the weeks leading up to the missions convention.

1. Have a meeting with your adult and youth Sunday school teachers to convey your vision for total involvement concerning faith promises. Sunday school teachers can be encouraged to take five or 10 minutes of class time a week or two before Faith Promise Sunday to challenge their class members to personal involvement in missions.

2. If members of the congregation have testimonies concerning how the Lord has enabled them to give to missions and how their lives have been blessed by it, ask a couple of them to share brief testimonies in services prior to the missions convention.
3. Short videos or a PowerPoint presentation concerning the missions faith promise, as well as other brief video reports, can be shown in church services and Sunday school classes leading up to the missions convention.

THE INTERNATIONAL DINNER

An international dinner featuring food from different areas of the world will give everyone a “taste” of life in a foreign country. If such a banquet is not feasible, a potluck will give your congregation an opportunity to meet and fellowship with missionary guests.

The following are just a few tips concerning an “international dinner,” if you have one on a Saturday evening before Faith Promise Sunday or at some other time in the convention:

1. You don’t need to have exotic, strange dishes. Readily available ethnic foods in America are good, such as Italian spaghetti, Chinese carry-out, Thai, Indian or Mexican food.
2. The international dinner does not necessarily need to have a sermon, but can be a time of informal sharing with the missionaries. If you do have a speaker, the message should be shorter than in a normal service. Many churches present the annual missions musical at their missions banquet.
3. One effective banquet feature for an international dinner is a Mexican piñata for the children to break. It can be a highlight of the evening. Piñatas are available for purchase in toy stores or party supply stores. They are crepe paper animals stuffed with little toys and candies. The piñata swings back and forth on a length of heavy twine or rope while blindfolded children take turns trying to hit it. These are a lot of fun for the kids (and parents alike). However, make sure everyone stands clear of the blindfolded child swinging the stick! A piece of one-inch plastic PVC pipe about a yard long will work very well for kids to swing and is less dangerous than a wooden stick.
4. People also like to dress in costumes if they have them. If some have been on missions trips, it gives them an opportunity to wear clothes they bought overseas. This can also highlight people of varied ethnic backgrounds in the congregation.

ADVERTISE

Missionaries will supply you with pictures and publicity information about themselves. Some newspapers list community religious events weekly. Some radio stations also do Public Service Announcements free of charge. Post pictures, posters or news stories about your speakers on the bulletin boards of the church so the congregation can be familiar with the convention participants before they arrive. The children’s department can conduct a poster contest, with the best entries to be hung in local places of business.

DECORATE

To make the convention a special occasion, decorate the church auditorium to highlight the theme. Flower arrangements by local “green thumbs” and curios or costumes provided by guest missionaries or international congregation members will brighten the sanctuary. Flags, posters, banners and pictures will add to the special atmosphere. Booths in the foyer dedicated to each missionary participating in the convention work well too. Builders and carpenters in your church can construct displays—African huts, etc.

RESOURCES AND DISPLAYS

World Missions will mail or you an order form that lists available materials. An annual catalog is also available. You may order supplies by telephone, fax or mail.

Some other suggestions are:

1. If you want to obtain international flags, contact Ozark Flag Distributors for a brochure and price list or visit www.ozarkflag.com. Their toll-free number is 800-288-3101.
2. You can obtain world maps in various sizes from the National Geographic Society. Visit shop.nationalgeographic.com or call their toll-free number 800-437-5521.
3. Probably the most effective display I have ever seen relating to faith promises was at Highway Tabernacle in Youngstown, Ohio. A large map of the world was constructed of plywood, holes were drilled in the map, and Christmas lights pushed into the holes from the back. Several sets of Christmas lights represented missionaries the church already supported. As the faith promises were tallied on Sunday morning at the conclusion of the service, the sets of Christmas lights were lit according to the five strategic regions of Assemblies of God World Missions. They lit up ten or so lights, as commitments came in to cover the support of ten missionaries. The last set of lights to be lit were those representing missionaries that the church wanted to begin supporting in the current year.

This display is a graphic way to demonstrate how supporting missionaries is only possible as people make commitments to give to missions on a regular basis.

PRESENTING THE FAITH PROMISE PLAN

A faith promise is a life-changing experience. God will use it to further fashion us according to His will and use us to bear fruit, that His kingdom will be increased and His name will be glorified.

The most effective method of overall missions funding is training your people to give regularly to missions just as they do to the local church through tithes and offerings. Missions giving should be a regular part of worship just as tithes and offerings.

THE SIX-MONTH FAITH PROMISE PROGRAM

Following are some major advantages to the six-month faith promise.

1. I believe people will generally trust God in faith to give more per week or per month for a six-month period than a year. Sometimes a year can seem long to people, and they will commit more conservatively for a longer period of time.
2. Since we know that the missions commitment program works and that God honors people's faith in this way, most people will commitment again six months later, and many will increase their commitment. Consequently, people will give more both in the first six months and then increasingly in the second six months than they would have given during a 12-month commitment.
3. If you have a 12-month program, new people coming into the church a month or two after the missions convention will have to wait 10 or 11 months before they have the opportunity to participate. If missions commitments are made every six months, they have an opportunity to participate sooner. This serves two valuable purposes,
 - a. First, if they are new believers, they are getting involved in missions giving early in their experience, when they tend to be most zealous and responsive.
 - b. Second, it increases the church's missions income for the year, giving the budget a boost during the second six-month period.
4. You may receive many requests from missionaries to come for services. If you have two missions emphases, they can be featured during those times rather than having missionaries every few weeks.

RECEIVING FAITH PROMISES

Receiving faith promises on Faith Promise Sunday can be done in several ways:

1. Faith promise cards can be enclosed in church bulletins, passed out to congregation members before the message, or distributed after the message.
2. After the congregation is led into filling out faith promise cards, they can be received by the ushers or placed in an offering bag when the missions offering is received at the conclusion of the service. Some pastors have missions committee members and/or board members and church staff bring their faith promises to the front to set an example of involvement.
3. If a number of missionaries are present in the convention, it is effective to have the missionaries receive the faith promises from the congregation. It is very helpful for the pastor to hold up the faith promise card and talk briefly about it before the missionary or a guest speaker comes to deliver the message and explains that faith promises will be received at the conclusion of the message.

I observed one pastor who had the church members come to the front and place their faith promise cards face down on the altar. This is very effective if the faith promises are tallied publicly at the conclusion of the service.

TALLYING FAITH PROMISES

There are two basic ways of tallying commitments: Totaling commitments after the morning service and announcing the total in the evening service, or tallying the commitments at the close of the morning service and announcing a running total while the congregation waits.

The second way is an inspiring, exciting time, but it must be well-planned. The following considerations are important:

1. The speaker should conclude his message at least 10 to 15 minutes before the normal closing time of the service. To do this, it is very important that the speaker be given the service as early as possible.
2. The tallying procedure should be well-organized so it runs smoothly and time is not wasted. Following are some suggestions:
 - a. Have ushers (or missionaries, if you have several) pick up the commitment cards and bring them to the tallying table. They should not wait until they receive all of the cards, but bring a few at a time toward the front. Keeping the ushers active and moving helps add to the excitement.
 - b. Have two or three people at a table to tally the commitments. One person is not enough. One person should have an adding machine to add the commitments, subtotaling them periodically so the pastor can announce it. (IMPORTANT: Even though you may be doing missions commitments for six-months, the amount of the commitment should be figured on an annual basis, since the missions budget is figured annually.) Two more people should calculate the annual amount of each commitment from the weekly or monthly figure written on the cards. They should use a red marking pen to write this amount in large figures on the commitment card. For example, a \$10 per week faith promise would be \$520 for a year. After the annual amount has been written in red and circled the cards should be passed to the person with the adding machine to total. This makes the total faith promise figure easier to calculate. It is critical that there be a clear understanding of procedure so the total that is announced is accurate. In one convention, there was confusion at the tallying table, and a figure was announced that was significantly larger than the actual amount that came in. The pastor was left in an embarrassing position of announcing Sunday night that the missions commitments were \$30,000 less than what had been announced that morning. To prevent such a thing from happening, choose reliable people for the tallying table!

Concerning the announcement of commitments, there are basically two approaches:

1. The pastor can read the amounts of individual commitments as they come in. As soon as the people who calculate the total commitment amount have circled the figure in red on the commitment cards, a stack of cards can be taken to the pastor to read aloud. Care has to be taken that a procedure is followed strictly concerning who gives the cards to whom. I suggest that the cards only be given to the pastor after they have been tallied by the person with the adding machine. Under no circumstance should the cards go back to the tallying table where they might be counted twice accidentally. One advantage of reading individual commitment amounts is the excitement it creates when people hear the number of commitments read and some of the large amounts that are given. One disadvantage is that when a large commitment is announced, people sometimes clap or vocally respond and no response is given for smaller commitments. (Often, of course, a smaller commitment might be a greater sacrifice for a person than a larger one that received more response.)
2. An alternative is to continually subtotal the amount and announce it periodically, possibly singing choruses in between.

BUDGETING THE MISSIONS INCOME

The final service should include prayer for your missionary speakers and guests. Invite the congregation to come forward, lay hands on them, and pray for God's protection and anointing upon their ministries. This prayer time will bind your congregation and missionaries together in a way that nothing else can. Be sure not to allow other things to supersede or interrupt this part of the convention.

By the final night of the convention you will find that the guest missionaries are no longer strangers. They will have become brothers and sisters. Their visit has added inspiration, and their reports of what God has done throughout the world will have built faith in the hearts of your congregation. These benefits will remain to bless your church for months and years to come.

During the week immediately following the missions convention, while the convention is fresh in your mind, call a meeting of the missions committee. Review every aspect of the convention and its planning. Ask the following questions:

1. What did we do right?
2. What did we do that we should not have done?
3. What did we leave out that we should have included?

Now is a good time to establish the annual missions budget for the next 12 months. Did you receive enough faith promises to meet your projected giving? You can now adjust your giving to actual income.

One word of caution might be helpful. If this was a first-time convention with faith promises, you do not yet have a record on the reliability of this income. For this reason, it is best not to budget the full amount of faith promises. If the total faith promise amount does come in, you will always find more missions needs in which you can invest later.

KEEPING MISSIONS BEFORE THE CONGREGATION

The following ideas can help you keep the level of missions interest high in the church:

1. If possible, include one-paragraph excerpts from recent missionary newsletters in each week's church bulletin. This practice provides the congregation with a weekly report from a missionary the church supports and focuses their attention on one missionary at a time. Special prayer can be featured in a Sunday service for the missionary that is featured in the bulletin that week. Mail that missionary a copy of the service bulletin in which he or she was remembered.
2. Use the weekly *Intercessor & World Report* to keep missions before the congregation. This publication can be faxed or e-mailed to you; call 417-862-3420 for subscription information.
3. Have missions committee members carefully read all the newsletters that missionaries send to the church. Urgent meaningful prayer requests can be passed along to the pastor to mention during a service prayer time.
4. Have your own missions convention brochure printed. A simple one can be printed using the theme bulletin covers. The World Missions U.S. Relations Department can also supply full-color artwork, logos and photos on CD. World Missions giving credit is granted for all printing expenses you incur.
5. A key to keeping missions commitments alive in the local church is "talking it up" by mentioning missions commitments whenever it can be appropriately done. People need to think of their missions commitment and building pledge with as much regularity as they do their tithes. My former pastor, Charles Crabtree, taught us whenever we took the offering to say, "Now it is time to receive God's tithe, our offerings, and faith promises." Just taking a few seconds each time the offering is received to mention faith promises as a regular part of the announcement at offering time keeps the concept before the people.

CONCLUSION

You may not be able to use all of the ideas presented in this booklet in one convention, or you may have other ideas that will suit your congregation better. But pray, plan early and be well-prepared.

MISSIONS CONVENTION CHECKLIST

10 to 12 Months Ahead or More

- Appoint a missions planning committee
- Set dates

8 to 10 Months Ahead

- Prepare schedule
- Confirm speakers

8 Months Ahead

- Announce convention dates

7 Months Ahead

- Announce convention dates again

6 Months Ahead

- Announce convention dates again
- Appoint subcommittees
- Decorations
- Hospitality and/or banquet
- Project
- Convention activities for children
- Convention activities for youth
- Advertising
- Prayer
- Ushers and tabulators
- Meet with committees, church leaders, staff and Sunday school teachers to explain the faith promise plan in detail. Use the "Missions Faith Promise" PowerPoint CD available from Assemblies of God World Missions.
- Request letters or videos from missionaries your church supports

4 Months Ahead

- Announce convention dates again

3 Months Ahead

- Announce convention dates again
- Order materials from Assemblies of God World Missions
- Request prayer for the convention
- Meet with subcommittees for reports

2 Months Ahead

- Begin announcing the convention weekly
- Activate prayer groups
- Determine advertising to be used
- Secure photos and news releases from the speakers

1 Month Ahead

- Announce convention, including your goals for it
- Reserve accommodations for the speakers
- Include missions literature such as “True Story” brochures in the church bulletin
- Meet with subcommittees for reports

3 Weeks Ahead

- Announce convention, including your goals for it
- Include missions literature in the church bulletin

2 Weeks Ahead

- Announce the convention
- Submit advertising
- Announce a prayer meeting for next week
- Meet with subcommittees for last-minute reports
- Include missions literature in the church bulletin
- Print the convention schedule in the bulletin

1 Week Ahead

- Conduct a special prayer meeting for the convention
- Preach a missionary message
- Include a folder on the faith promise plan in the bulletin the week before Faith Promise Sunday
- Announce the convention in detail, including your goals for it
- Decorate the church, using theme materials from Assemblies of God World Missions U.S. Relations Department
- Prepare a special bulletin with a thumbnail sketch of each missionary supported, the church's present missions budget, and the proposed missions budget.

Additional copies of this publication and other missionary pamphlets and tracts may be ordered by:

writing

Assemblies of God World Missions
1445 N. Boonville Avenue
Springfield, Missouri 65802-1894

or calling

800-988-6568

You may want to order the book *Proven Missions Convention Ideas* from Assemblies of God World Missions, which contains ideas from many local churches and missionary leaders. Visit www.missions.ag.org to learn more about Assemblies of God Missions and other resources that are available.