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# Why Missions?

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# WHY MISSIONS?

BY MATTHEW BENNETT

Missions is part of the DNA of Cedarville University. I first realized this during my faculty interview when Dr. White cited the famous 19th-century haystack prayer meeting, saying, “If a worldwide missions movement could begin under a haystack, my prayer is that the next one starts right here in the cornfields of Ohio.” I heartily agree. Since you are reading this magazine, I suspect you probably do, too. In fact, a number of Cedarville’s greatest distinctives emerge by unpacking our answer to the question, **“Why is missions so important at Cedarville?”** While an adequate response warrants a book, I will restrict myself to a theological reason, a cooperative reason, and a strategic reason.



## WHY DOES MISSIONS EXIST?

Before we ask specifically about Cedarville's involvement in missions, we should consider why missions exists at all. Contrary to some models, thinking biblically about missions begins way before Paul and Barnabas. It begins even before Jonah and Abraham. In fact, missions begins in Genesis 1:1. By His act of creation — particularly human creation — God demonstrates His desire to be known. In the incarnation and the Gospel, we see the extent to which God will go to make Himself known. And by



sending the Holy Spirit, God invites and empowers His Church into His mission to be known. One might say that our triune God is Himself the first missionary. As such, our summons to missions is naturally bound up in the mission of God itself.

Too often, however, the language of missions is used to encompass all the various good, philanthropic activities that reflect God's desires for wholeness, peace, and justice on a social level. Building projects, health clinics, orphan care, and the like are all important humanitarian activities. Yet these good endeavors, when detached from evangelism, discipleship, and church planting, do not constitute biblical missions.

Instead, God has given us clear instructions about playing our role within His ultimate mission. Often referred to as the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18–20 includes a clear description of how Christians are to participate in God's mission: make disciples indiscriminately, baptize them, and teach them to obey all that Jesus commanded. The Great Commission is the mission of the church, and through it, we make God known and play our part in God's mission.

In light of this commission, we must recognize there are places in the world where people have never heard the Gospel, where disciples have not been made yet, and there is currently no church offering acceptable worship to God in Christ. This is where the need for international missions arises. In the oft-quoted words of John Piper's *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, "Missions exists because worship doesn't." International missions, then, is a crucial component of the mission of the Church. And at Cedarville, our students have a pivotal role to play.

## WHY DOES CEDARVILLE INVEST IN MISSIONS?

Cedarville does not send missionaries, but we partner with churches in missions. Since Cedarville exists for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ, our University is inextricably tied to the service of Jesus' Church and her mission. Primarily, we do this by preparing men and women to enter both the workforce and their local churches equipped as disciple-makers.

In light of this, we encourage students to take advantage of our many Global Outreach trips during their 1,000 days on campus. These trips encourage students to consider where God might be calling them to leverage their skills, talents, credentials, and passions in service of the Great Commission.

To this end, our Global Outreach team cooperates with churches, ministries, and indigenous partners throughout the world to provide our students with opportunities to use their training and passions for Kingdom impact. On such missions trips, our students not only receive the opportunity to share their

expertise and the Good News of the Gospel, but they also have the blessing of encountering God's work through their international brothers and sisters.

While these trips often prove fruitful in the lives and ministries of the hosts, the students themselves regularly return with a fresh excitement for the Gospel because they have learned that the truth about Jesus is not an American phenomenon, but a universal message. Furthermore, students see their vocations through a fresh lens, recognizing how they might leverage their vocation for the Kingdom. In many ways, each of our missions trips are vision trips for our students, and we pray the Lord will use these domestic and international experiences to ignite a passion for lifelong missions. In light of this, the third reason Cedarville invests in missions is to equip our graduates for a new wave of mission endeavors.

## HOW IS CEDARVILLE EQUIPPING STUDENTS FOR A LIFETIME OF MISSIONS AND GOSPEL IMPACT?

This is what excites me the most. I took this job, in part, because of the chance to teach not only those planning a life of long-term missions, but to inspire those whose vocations are not traditionally associated with missions. These very vocations, however, serve an important role in many contemporary missions strategies for gaining access to countries and regions increasingly opposed to traditional Christian missionaries. Since nearly all of the world's unreached people groups live in places of restricted access, missionaries who can find work as engineers, educators, healthcare professionals, and computer programmers have a strategic advantage over traditional approaches.

Many of these students already have a vision to use their vocation to access otherwise-closed countries as tentmaker missionaries. However, most tentmaking or business-as-missions models are heavy on preparing people for their vocation, yet light on missions and theology. Our Bible minor ensures that every one of our graduates receives robust scriptural training and is challenged to consider his or her vocation through a biblical worldview. In addition, The Graduate School at Cedarville University has the unique ability to create additional pathways for business, nursing, engineering, and education majors to receive further theological preparation in only about two additional years. For example, with our newly approved Advanced M.Div. program, we are creating ways to complete a bachelor's degree in business and an M.Div. in as little as six years. Similar pathways are possible for most of our existing programs, allowing students to prepare with excellence both for their job and for missions.

By God's grace, Cedarville University has become a strategic leader for equipping people professionally and theologically to serve the Church on mission throughout the world. I am excited to see what the Lord has in store for Cedarville and how what He does here will impact His world.

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### Meet Matthew Bennett

Matthew Bennett, Assistant Professor of Missions and Theology, joined Cedarville in 2017 after serving six years teaching and leading an English as a Second Language (ESL) school and cultural exchange program in Egypt.

The ESL program became the catalyst for cultural exchange ... and stereotype correction. "People in the Middle East consider the United States a Christian nation, so anything produced here is a Christian product, like MTV and Hollywood," Bennett said. "We were able to bring groups over who countered those ideas, infused with Gospel purpose."

Now at Cedarville, Bennett wants to help students realize that whatever their major — business, nursing, engineering, to name a few — there is tremendous potential for Gospel impact on an international level.

"You may have a vocation that seems to locate you in the United States," he said, "but with a globalized society, you can take those skills anywhere and leverage them strategically to come alongside what the Lord is doing in His world."