

What Is An Engaging Church?

Hundreds of West Africa's smaller unreached people groups will never have full-time missionaries working among them. Churches in the USA and around the world are accepting the challenge of taking the Gospel to these people groups that may otherwise never hear. Such missionary-minded churches are called "Engaging Churches."

Churches are enlisted to engage a people group when:

- no International Mission Board missionaries are assigned to the people group.
- there is no significant church planting activity among the people group.

The Engaging Church commits to create an environment for evangelism, discipleship and leadership training that will ignite a movement of churches planting churches among a West African people group. The Engaging Church employs strategies consistent with sound missiological principles to ensure that churches are reproducing in the African context without dependency upon outside resources.

In essence, the Engaging Church is the “missionary” who takes on the responsibility to do whatever it takes to ensure that the Gospel message is made available to every person among their focus people group.

Initially, Engaging Churches will receive some training and logistical assistance from an Engagement Team member. The Engagement Team is made up of IMB missionaries who conduct field research on the unreached people groups of West Africa and suggest strategies for reaching these people. Engagement Team members will assist Engaging Churches, but the church is ultimately responsible for developing and implementing a plan to fulfill the Great Commission among an unengaged people group.

An Engaging Church can be...

- large or small – a passion for reaching the lost is all that matters!
- a single church or a group of churches working together.
- a state convention or association.

Does It Really Work?

Yes! Check out these stories of Engaging Churches in action:

Calvary Church of Neosho, Missouri, Engaging the Manjaku of Senegal

In 2005, Calvary of Neosho members voted to become an Engaging Church to the Manjaku, an unreached group of about 228,000. The pastor led two small teams on vision trips to Senegal while the rest of the church stayed behind to pray faithfully. The two vision teams used the Creation to Christ story to lead nearly 80 Manjaku to Christ! They also gathered contacts and resources to start building their church planting strategy so their future teams wouldn't have to totally depend on field missionaries.

Here are resources they've discovered along the way:

- an English-speaking Manjaku believer who volunteers as a translator.
- contacts with mission agencies in the area who are translating a Manjaku Bible.
- a local radio station that agreed to consider a Christian Manjaku program.
- another Missouri church to engage the Manjaku of The Gambia, which borders Senegal.

Calvary sends multiple teams each year to plant churches and disciple new believers.

Stonebridge Church of Nixa, Missouri, Engaging the Kagoro of Mali

Stonebridge Church wrote out a plan for planting churches among the Kagoro of Mali, and has since sent multiple strategic teams each year to do everything from eyeglass clinics to prayer walking and evangelism.

After laying much groundwork, the church sent a team that prayed specifically for seekers to emerge. That day, a Kagoro villager named Baba came forward to tell the Stonebridge team that he wanted to follow Christ. He and some friends burned the fetishes of their former animistic faith. The Stonebridge volunteers taught Baba and his friends the basics of faith, and now they are worshipping regularly on their own.

Future Stonebridge teams will focus specifically on discipling Baba's group and encouraging the new believers to multiply. In fact, Stonebridge is training Baba's group to engage another nearby people group that is unengaged.

Expectations of an Engaging Church

An Engaging Church is expected to...

1. Make a long-term commitment (minimum of 3-5 years) to evangelism, discipleship and church planting among a people group with the goal of seeing a self-sustaining movement among them.
2. Employ strategies consistent with missiological principles that ensure church reproduction in the African context without creating dependency on outside resources.
3. Plant Baptist churches. While partnerships can be developed with other Christian organizations, new churches should be Baptist in doctrine and practice.
4. Form a Leadership Team that will keep a compelling vision before the church and enlist the involvement of the entire body. The Leadership Team will be responsible for building a prayer network; coordinating and training short-term mission teams; and evaluating and reporting progress to the church and the West Africa Engagement Team.
5. Develop and implement a master plan for reaching the people group. This plan will include strategies for research, evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, church planting and transitioning out of the work.
6. Train and regularly send teams, (ideally at least 4-6 times per year).
7. Become self-facilitating. While IMB missionaries will provide assistance for initial teams, the church should become increasingly responsible for arrangements like local transportation, housing, meals, currency exchange, translators, etc.

The Engagement Team Will Assist the Engaging Church by ...

1. Advising the church in the selection of an unengaged people group.
2. Providing direction and advice for master plan development.
3. Assisting with logistical facilitation for the first several teams who visit the field.
4. Providing orientation and debriefing for the first several teams who visit the field.
5. Informing initial teams about availability of supplies and local vendors, housing and transportation options, translators and other resources that will move the church toward becoming self-facilitating.
6. Praying for the church and their focus people group.
7. Advising on master plan revisions.
8. Consulting as needed to complete the task.