
United Reformed Missions Association

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URMA DEFINITIONS CONCERNING MISSIONS

The Word of God: URMA holds that the Bible is the Holy and infallible Word of God written down by human authors over the ages through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We recognize the 66 books of the Bible to be the Canon of Scripture, the total and complete revelation of God. The revelation of the Word ended with the death of the apostles.

Christian Doctrines: URMA believes that the teachings of the Three Forms of Unity, the Westminster Standards, and the three Ecumenical Creeds are all in accordance with the Word of God. They are to be used to assist the believer in the study of God's Word. These writings do not take the place of Holy Scripture, but they complement Scripture by simplifying and explaining the truths found in the Bible.

Member Church: In order for a body of believers in Christ to be considered a member church of URMA, its Consistory/Session is asked to subscribe to the following statements:

- A member church will be a Reformed church that agrees with the URMA philosophy, adheres to the historic Reformed faith, and is committed to the Ecumenical Creeds, the Three Forms of Unity, and/or the Westminster Standards.
- A member church will actively pray for the organization and its work corporately.
- A member church will promote to their congregation to prayerfully consider how they can best serve the various opportunities that are presented to the congregation by URMA.
- A member church will assist URMA financially by taking one or two offerings per year. Undesignated donations will be deposited in the general fund of URMA for the organizations operating budget.
- A member church will prayerfully consider nominating male members, in good standing within their respective church, to serve as board members of the URMA.
- The primary means of support, financial and other wise, for URMA is through our member churches.

Missionary: “The church’s missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. When this task is to be performed beyond the field of an organized church, it is to be carried out by ordained ministers of the Word set apart to this labor, who are called, supported, and supervised by their Consistories. The churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries.”[1]

Therefore, URMA deems missionaries to be those who hold the office of Minister of the Word. They are ordained, supervised, and commissioned by a local church Consistory.

Missionary Helpers (see also Individuals Going to the Field): “Although the Church’s involvement in missions is to be conducted at an official and commissioned level, it would be a grave error to conclude that non-commissioned members of Christ’s church are therefore excluded from participation. The New Testament is replete with examples of individuals who volunteered their time, gifts, and resources for the Kingdom (Luke 19:29-34; 22:9-13; 23:50-56). During Paul’s ministry we find even more participation from individual believers: those whose hospitality he enjoyed (Acts 16:14-25), his fellow travelers (Acts 19:29; 20:4), his fellow laborers (Romans 16:3; Phil 4:2-3), and all the others who are typically mentioned at the close of most of his epistles. Those practices lead us to believe that there is ample room in missions for those who are not office bearers. They may be labeled as ‘missionary helpers’. There is ample room for individual service. In certain areas the work of individuals or independent organizations can be effectively incorporated alongside the institutional work of the Church.”[2] The work of such “Missionary Helpers” is wide and varied. They may be using their talents as builders, mechanics, doctors, nurses, teachers, canvassers, or those trained in evangelism. There are some organizations that act as “Missionary Helpers” as well. These organizations are throughout the world bringing relief to those who are in need physically, mentally, and emotionally. They may bring goods like food, water, and clothing. They may bring services such as medical care, dental care, Biblical counseling, and Reformed literature to those who are in need. Missionary Helpers, both domestic and foreign, are those who show acts of mercy to those who are in need. These individuals and organizations are using their God-given talents to spread the Gospel and show Christ-like love and compassion. This service may be for a short term or for a long-term.

Individuals are to be supervised by a local church Consistory and supported by many different people and churches. Through faith in Christ, these individuals hold the office of Believer. It is our conviction that it is of utmost importance for these “Helpers” to work in conjunction with a local church or missionary as they carry out the work of Christ. URMA deems Missionary Helpers to primarily be individuals who are not ordained into a specific office of the church, yet are believers who travel to the mission field to perform service work for people groups and to be a “Reformed” presence in that community. Their spiritual oversight comes from the consistory of the church of which they are members. Funds to support such individuals are provided from individual donors and/or churches and organizations. These funds may be routed through the organization or the group that they are assisting.

Oversight of a Missionary or a Missionary Helper: URMA holds fast to the principle that the local church is ultimately governed by its ordained elders (the Consistory). It is these elders who have the final authority in dealing with the spiritual health of the individual who is on or is travelling to the mission field in a particular area of the world. URMA is not a sending organization for such individuals. However, URMA will attempt to come along-side and help the Missionaries, Missionary Helpers, Ministry of Mercy Organizations, and Church Planters who are deemed worthy of such help by a Consistory of our member churches.

For more specifics concerning the Consistory's role in the planning of a service project see the "Supervision" section of these definitions.

Ministry of Mercy organizations: Ministry of Mercy organizations (MoM) are organizations that are set up, over seen, and sent by a local consistory to assist the distribution of material goods and supplies in Jesus Christ's name. These may or may not have a Minister of the Word as its director. It is up to the elders of a church to determine whether a particular MoM is deemed worthy of support by that church. These organizations pass out materials to those who come for assistance in order to bring the Gospel to those whom they are helping.

URMA supports these Ministry of Mercy organizations and will assist them, when asked, based upon the decision of the overseeing church. URMA understands that these institutions are very important in helping the Gospel to be introduced into places that do not have Missionaries present.

"Non-Reformed" Christian Ministries: URMA considers these to be organizations that do not necessarily have the "Three Forms of Unity" or the Westminster Standards at their foundation. As such, they are "non-Reformed" in their understanding of Scripture and in their formation. URMA believes, however, that there are times that exposure to our confessions through the interaction of our Reformed volunteers may help those in such groups to come to know our Reformed beliefs. By this interaction, those who are served will come to see where we stand on issues of Scripture from our Reformed perspective, and with God's help they may be led to a richer understanding of His Word. URMA will assist such "Non-Reformed" Christian ministries only upon the approval and recommendation of a consistory of our member churches.

"Non-Christian" Ministries: URMA considers ministries like "Habitat for Humanity" for example to be in this category. They supply material needs to the community at large. We believe that it is up to a local Consistory to decide whether such an agency is worthy of their support. Working with such organizations can give us the opportunity to share the gospel of Christ with those with whom we are working, as well as to show the love of Christ to them by using our gifts and abilities as a willing volunteer. URMA will assist such "Non-Christian" ministries only upon the approval and recommendation of a consistory of our member churches.

Missionary Associates: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church considers lay people, as well as those who are ordained, who come alongside Active Missionaries in their particular field to be “Missionary Associates.”

URMA considers Missionary Associates to be in the same category as “Missionary Helpers” and “Individuals Going to the Field (Non-Ordained).” URMA will work with likeminded denominations such as those who are members of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches) to assist them in finding individual workers when asked, and by offering opportunities to believers from our URMA member churches to help fill these needs.

Individuals Going to the Field (Non-Ordained): From time to time, individuals are given opportunities to serve in missions on a longer term capacity than just one or two weeks. More support may be needed for these individuals, and they may be asked to give that support directly to the organization that they are serving. These particular organizations may or may not be of the historic Reformed persuasion. Each consistory should make their own decision as to whether or not that individual will be doing the work of God on that particular field and if they are able to bring a Reformed perspective to the organization which he or she will be helping. Each individual is ultimately under the supervision of their consistory even if he or she is working somewhere else. If that consistory deems the individual and the work that they will be doing worthy, then the elders in good conscience should be able to send the support needed.

As stated already URMA understands the importance of individuals to be under the supervision of their Consistory. They are valuable tools in the hands of the Holy Spirit for the spread of the truths of the Reformed faith and the Gospel of Christ. As such they are worthy of our prayers and help.

Church Plants: Church Plants are a group of individuals or families that hold fast to the Reformed faith and desire to meet together for Bible Study and Worship. A Minister of the Word is called to shepherd this group. A church plant usually does not have the resources either financially or spiritually to be on its own, so they are typically under the supervision of an established consistory. Once men have been found to step into the official offices of the church (Elders and Deacons), they usually proceed to becoming an organized church. This does not necessarily mean that they are now completely stable financially, but it does mean that spiritually they are striving to be sound in doctrine and life.

URMA will strive to come alongside these Church Plants and Church Planters who have the approval of an overseeing Consistory. We uphold all these Church Plants as worthy, however the Church Plants that are overseen by our member churches will take precedence for us as we do our work.

Consistory: Throughout this document the term “consistory” refers to the ruling body of elders, officially installed into this office, who preside over the individual believers in a given church.

Supervision: The oversight of a URMA sponsored or assisted trip falls upon the church's consistory of which the individual or group are members. An individual or group should approach and make their consistory aware of their intentions to go on a trip. The group or individual should gain approval from their consistory as to whether or not they should participate. Each group should have a designated leader who goes on the trip with them who has the capabilities to serve the group as their spiritual leader. That leader should ordinarily have a plan for daily devotions and/or instruction. These do not necessarily have to be formal times of worship, but there does need to be daily times of reflection and direction to help keep the perspective of why the group is there. The elders should evaluate each trip and the individuals who go on it so as to oversee the spiritual aspect of the trip and group.

While URMA strives to help our Reformed brothers and sisters first, there are other areas of the world that also need to see Reformed truths lived out in the lives of those who volunteer. We rely on the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of those we assist in order to turn them to Him. URMA desires for everyone to come under the means of grace by the pure preaching of the Gospel. As URMA makes inroads into the different communities of the world it is our prayer that by the example of those serving with us that the Spirit will move those who witness our lives to have a saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

URMA will attempt to avoid travel on the Lord's Day and to avoid travel times that would prevent the proper preparation of our participants for worship on Sunday. All travel plans suggested by URMA should always be brought to the local consistory for their advice and direction as it pertains to the members under their care. The Consistory of each participant should also examine all the travel plans for the trip and give their approval. For example, if the trip would cause those involved to be absent from the means of grace on a Lord's Day, or if the travel would cause them not to be properly prepared for worship the consistory should consider whether or not to give their approval to the trip. The decision of the elders concerning such travel is to be considered the authority over any URMA advice that is given.

Whenever an URMA trip takes place over a Sunday we will ensure that a God-glorifying worship service is available for our participants to attend.

URMA does not spiritually oversee any service project and deems that this is best left for the local consistory – or consistories in joint projects – to do. Individuals or groups are to obtain the approval of their elders before undertaking any trip. All trips should value the need for a spiritual leader and the importance of presenting the Gospel to all involved in the event.

[1] Article 47 URCNA Church Order.