

# On Mission 2020

*Topic Focus: Mobilization*

## **Sharon Hoover - Centerville Presbyterian Church** ***On-Ramps for Missions in the Local Church***

Hello this is Sharon Hoover. I serve as the Director of Missions at Centerville Presbyterian Church in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC. And I'm going to talk about ways to develop on-ramps to missions in the local church.

Today we're going to consider three specific areas. First, how to create an environment that values co-laboring or working together. Second, and the bulk of the presentation, is how to develop on-ramps that will best connect your church and your church members with your mission partners and missionaries. And third, how to be aware of the concerns and the challenges that come with developing on-ramps.

So first, as we prayerfully seek ways to connect our congregation with God's work around the world, it's imperative to convey that we are co-laboring in this mission, that we're all working together, so whenever possible in sermons or social media posts and even casual conversations, tell this story of God's bigger purpose for our churches as well as for our individual church members. So using scriptures such as Ephesians 4 or First Corinthians 12. All of those we can demonstrate the need for all the gifts of all the people. Without each person in place something is missing. We all have a role to play. And one of the roles of the church is to help our members be able to discern their place in God's calling. With our knowledge of missions and mission partners, we are able to help connect people's abilities and their gifts and their interests with the spiritual and physical needs of people on the planet. These one-time opportunities provide on-ramps for ongoing relationships and partnerships. And those long-term relationships are where the opportunities arise to be able to share the Gospel message with others. So once we have fostered this type of environment to invite people to come and join us, we can begin investing our efforts and presenting on-ramps in order to connect them.

So let's consider some on-ramps. These are opportunities. They're low-commitment opportunities for people to be able to explore ways to use their gifts and their talents for Kingdom purposes. So one way is to develop options around specifically their gifts and their interests and their vocations. So consider identifying opportunities to serve with the abilities that are needed. So cooking a meal for a shelter, organizing computer files for a ministry or teaching a new immigrant how to use the public transportation system in your community. All give opportunities for our willing volunteers to explore using their gifts and their knowledge for Kingdom purposes.

On-ramps for global connections can also be developed with a well-planned short-term team or vision trip. The professional knowledge of doctors, and educators, engineers, electricians, plumbers. All these can offer valuable assistance to our global ministry partners.

And this leads to another consideration when developing on-ramps. Consider offering different varieties of time commitments, so for example, someone could try something for one hour. So, like making deliveries to a food pantry or they could maybe do a one-day commitment working with a home rehab group within your church or I mean, within your community. It could also happen. Or maybe someone could do a weeklong commitment in an opportunity to be able to go as we mentioned a few minutes ago on a short-term team. Each of these opportunities give our church family the opportunity to learn about a mission organization and consider being able to give more of their resources to be able to serve with them.

Another option to consider is a variety of locations. So as you're developing on route on-ramps and ways for people to serve, figure out something that someone can do from home, so they could be your online liaison with a missionary connecting with them regularly. They could help develop a website for a mission partner, they could what if they facilitated your prayer ministry? So there are things that someone can do at home and hours that they have better control over. One possibility is to help your church members be able to connect with their own neighbors. That that is a place. So one church provides resources, provides the funds to help their church members host block parties on their street with the idea of getting to know one another better and then being able to host a small group on their street. Or you could create on-ramps that connect in a larger community. So with, like we've already mentioned working and helping out at a food pantry or a homeless shelter or other outreaches that are serving those who are in your city or further out from your immediate neighborhood.

And then of course, requiring travel and cross-cultural experiences. It would be good to offer opportunities to be able to go farther and to be able to serve mission partners and ministries that are, that might require your passport, but certainly required travel.

One more idea in developing on-ramps is to think about life stages that people are in. So what if you develop on-ramps that are for intergenerational opportunities. So where you have parents and children serving together and I recognize this can be quite a challenge, but it can be done. So like, for example, putting together hygiene kits for church world services or putting together a pot roast that can be taken to a homeless shelter. All these opportunities for parents and children to be able to serve together at home but it's a time when parents can be able to talk about the physical and the spiritual needs of people around their community. And what about offering on-ramps for the older members in our congregation with their more flexible schedules retired men and women, for example, could be available to go to the airport to pick up missionaries who are coming home on furlough. Some of our retired families in our own congregation have picked up missionaries and have been able to provide housing. So by hosting a missionary or missionary family for a few days, they have become interested in a whole new mission field that they didn't know about and so that provides a great on-ramp to help people be able to connect.

Finally, let's talk about some of the challenges and the concerns when we do develop on-ramps. There are several things to be aware of. Ultimately, we want people to come to know Jesus. As we develop on-ramps, it's important to help people keep the bigger story before them. We can do this by encouraging our congregation members to be praying for the individuals that they meet and they connect with on their on-ramp opportunities. We can also offer training to help our members be able to turn a conversation into a spiritual one. So, the casual "Hello, how are you?" If one is prepared can be able to talk about maybe an illustration or an example of something that happened at church. And this could potentially open up the conversation for a longer topic, be able to talk about faith and faith-based things.

Another concern with on-ramps is that they would become a destination. So to prevent this potential stopping ground, it's good to think through next steps for their congregations. After they have done their on-ramp activity, so you would follow up with them right after that experience and find out how it went. If it went well, encourage them to continue participation and see if there's a way that they might want to connect further or if it didn't go well, you can find out and help them to redirect and maybe try another on-ramp.

Finally, when developing on-ramps, we have an opportunity or we have a responsibility to our missionaries and to our mission partners, creating on-ramps and opportunities to serve for example, on a weekday night at a local food pantry requires the pantry staff to stay late. Now that may actually be more of a burden to the ministry than it is being a help. And so be sure to be reaching out to missionaries and to local ministry partners to find out what is effective. Likewise, it's not a good idea to plan a vision trip or a short-term team without really consulting and talking with your global partners. This -you should be able to ask them, "What is the impact on your ministry if we bring a team?" Instead the conversation should begin with our missionary ask them, "How can we serve you? In our congregation we have nurses, or we have educators, or we have home rehab people. If we came, is there a way that we could help extend your ministry?" We don't serve in a vacuum. So, better understanding our community and the communities of our missionaries will help us to serve well. On-ramps can be a valuable way to connect our churches to the mission field.

So, in summary, to be effective, number one: create an environment that values working together. Secondly, develop a wide variety of types of on-ramps to help your congregation to find their unique places to serve. And finally, be attentive to the concerns and the challenges that arise when developing on-ramps. More details about mobilizing the church and developing ministry strategy are in my book called Mapping Church Missions. Here it is. and also the publisher Intervarsity Press, has a Leader's Guide so you can walk through the book with your church or your team.

It's been great being a part of the On Mission Conference this year and I hope this presentation has given you some ideas that you can use today. This has been Sharon Hoover. It's been great to be with you. this is about building relationships. And the sixth key is that it ends in prayer.