



**MAPPING
CHURCH
MISSIONS**

SHARON R. HOOVER

A COMPASS
FOR MINISTRY
STRATEGY



*Mapping Church Missions: A
Compass for Ministry Strategy*
Available September 25, 2018
\$18, 193 pages, paperback
978-0-8308-4146-2

*"I so much wish I had this book in
my hands when I served as a
church missions pastor. Sharon
combines her years of experience
in church missions leadership
with practical stories to help
every church, mission leadership
team, and individual discover the
way forward. . . . We don't need
to be afraid of the road ahead – in
spite of the potential or perceived
obstacles. Study the map, listen to
Sharon's voice, fuel your future
involvement with wisdom, and
drive confidently."*

From the foreword by **Paul
Borthwick**

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Witness or Wanderers?

Amanda put three cans of green beans, toilet paper, and diapers in the food pantry's collection box in the church lobby. She stopped to talk with an elder, Mike, about coordinating the collection of school supplies for children of impoverished families in the community. After strategizing with Mike about how best to get the word out about the school supplies to a busy congregation, Amanda stopped by the missions table to get a flyer for next summer's mission trip to Kenya. Just as she left the building, she crossed paths with Megan, who was selling fair-trade jewelry. Amanda's necklace collection was already overflowing from previous purchases, each supporting women rescued from sex trafficking. But yes, she would come to Megan's jewelry party next week.

Despite her monthly donations to an international refugee agency and a missionary in Bolivia, Amanda felt guilty as she threw away mail asking for financial donations to cancer research. Television commercials about children with cleft palates caused her to reach for the mute button on the remote control. Web ads and television commercials of dogs in abusive homes added pressure to her overburdened, empathetic heart. After a particularly guilt-ridden week, Amanda wondered whether her actions changed anyone's life for the better.

I have lost count of the number of people who have told me how similar their missional engagement is to Amanda's story. This broad approach to kingdom work introduces people to the abundant needs but it does not result in meaningful connection. Despite hoping to make a significant difference, their attention instead moves rapidly from one outreach partner to another.

Are Amanda's efforts – and those of many people like her – more like serial dating? Kent Annan, codirector of Haiti Partners, likens this missions approach to flirting, bouncing from romance to romance: "When someone behaves this way in his teens or early twenties, we shake our heads and figure he'll mature. If he keeps flipping through relationships into his thirties and forties, the immaturity starts to look pathological." Surely the church can find a better way to connect God's people with the world's spiritual and physical needs.

Sometimes our congregants may know their passions, but ways to serve according to those passions remain elusive. Ministries beckon from all directions. Amidst the many worthy causes, intentionality is lost. Tragically, the noise crowds out God's voice. So, instead of serving and giving where the Spirit leads them, our members often serve when the calendar has space and give when the bank account allows.

At any moment in the day, we can look around us and find abundant physical, mental, and spiritual needs. Which way should we step? Toward the friend who struggles with depression? The neighbor who does not know Christ? The man on the corner with the "Will Work for Food" sign? The AIDS orphan in last night's news story? The three billion people

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BOOK EXCERPT



Sharon R. Hoover is the director of missions at Centreville Presbyterian Church in Centreville, Virginia, where she has served for more than twenty years. She is passionate about equipping the local church to serve and connect with ministry partners worldwide.

unreached by the gospel message? The new missionary family trying to raise monthly support?

As followers of Christ, we recognize serving as a critical part of our spiritual journey. Yet we lose years in the ongoing search for the best ways to connect. Ample opportunities exist to explore God's call to missional engagement, but the pursuit overwhelms. It's like staring at a compass but still not knowing which way to go. Life's busyness, our lack of knowledge, and persuasive voices all around us complicate the search. Furthermore, the global landscape of missions is ever changing. New expressions of ministry emerge almost daily. Political and cultural dynamics open and close opportunities as fast as a revolving door.

Both congregants and churches alike intend to serve with purpose, but experiences rather than research tend to drive our models for ministry. Friends, agencies, and random emails invite us to join them to influence the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Soon scattered volunteer hours and random impersonal donations form our approach to missions. Each new missions opportunity merely adds to a collection of temporal outings. Our primary role as witnesses for Christ gets buried under the clutter of good intentions.

— Taken from the introduction, *"Charting Our Course"*