

## Evangelistic Organizations

Dear brother Rushmore, ...I am a member of the Lord's Church in ...Nigeria. ...Is it scriptural for a group of individual brothers to form an association, with a name registered with the relevant government authority, having the aim to preach the Gospel or doing charity [work] or both? For instance: Association of Nigerian Brethren in the US, with the mission to evangelize and establish congregations of the Lord's Church in remote villages in Nigeria. Brothers in my locality are having contrary views. Those who resist the strategy say that only the church/local congregation should preach the gospel, that other associations/names cause divisions.

The only organization authorized and charged with the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world is the one church for which Jesus died to establish (Acts 20:28), over which He is the Head (Colossians 1:18) and that bears His name (Romans 16:16). That being said, the church is comprised of individual members (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) who are responsible for church growth (Ephesians 4:16). The Great Commission to evangelize the world was given initially to the remaining eleven apostles of Christ (Mark 16:15-16). The responsibility of the church relies upon the individual element, and the church can do nothing without the activity of Christians.

Therefore, it would be biblically correct for a church program to be organized under the oversight of a congregational eldership to evangelize as the work of the church. However, there is no scriptural authority for an organization outside of the church to assume for itself the responsibility to evangelize the world with the Gospel. Yet, individual Christians, answerable to the respective congregations of which they are members, ought to show initiative to tell others about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and about His church. Furthermore, either individual Christians or congregations may voluntarily cooperate to practice evangelism.

For instance, World Evangelism of which I am a team member, is a church program primarily intended to promote evangelism, and the other team members and I voluntarily cooperate with each other to do that. Each of us is under the oversight of our respective congregations, and we and the congregations that oversee us voluntarily cooperate.

A separately structured organization referred to as a missionary society historically existed beyond local congregations, received dues from its member congregations and took the responsibility away from local congregations for foreign mission work. This setup was not biblically correct, interrupted God's scheme of congregational autonomy (self-ruling) and resulted in a major division in the latter 19th century and early 20th century between the churches of Christ and the Christian Church. Some para-church organizations today resemble the missionary society in organization. A similar purpose without violating biblical authority can be accomplished by placing evangelistic efforts under a local congregational eldership or more than one congregation voluntarily cooperating but responsible for its members who work alongside of each other.

Benevolence, though, is another matter. God does not expect the Lord's church to be responsible for all benevolence or charity work on earth. He does, however, expect the Lord's church to be responsible for all evangelistic work on earth. Yes, Christians and congregations of the Lord's church are to practice benevolence toward Christians and non-Christians as opportunities and resources allow (Galatians 6:10), but benevolence is not limited to either Christians or to the church.

Christians ought to act benevolently, and they are chargeable to the congregations of which they are members. In addition, Christians may cooperate and even organize themselves for better efficiency to accomplish benevolence or charity work. However, especially if what they do is represented as attributable to the churches of Christ, then that organized effort would do well to be under the oversight of an eldership of some local congregation.

*By Louis Rushmore*