The "Great Disconnect"

By Bill Moberly

Ideas From Churches, November 2026

Ideas From Churches and the "Great Commission"

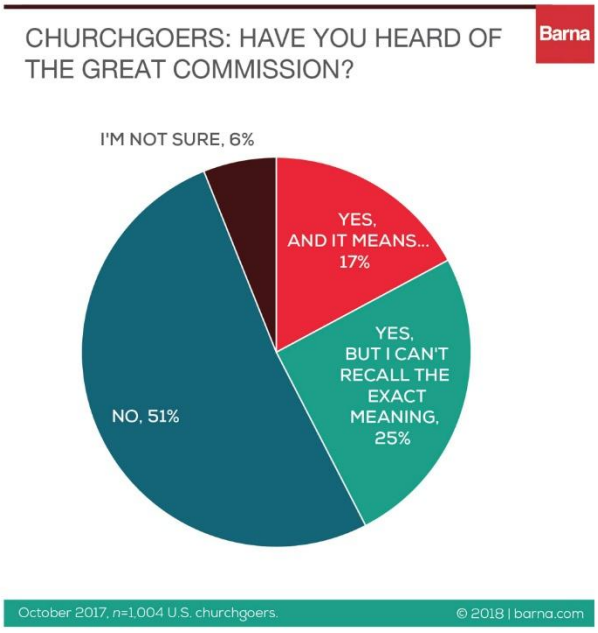
The "Ideas from Churches" category of CGM Magazine is predicated on two simple premises:

1. The Great Commission is still a mandate for the local church, and
2. congregational Leaders actually want to find ways to be meaningfully, strategically and effectively engaged in answering God's call to make disciples of all the nations (*ethne*).

Put another way: every congregation (rural or urban, large or small, centuries old or just planted) is called by God to the nations, so we are committed to excellence!

Barna Group Research Surveys

Is this the prevailing mindset in your church? If your answer is "No", two recent Barna research group polls shed light on why. Several years ago, their research found that less than one in five active church attenders across denominational lines had heard of the Great Commission and actually knew what it was! In answer to this question: "Have you heard of the Great Commission?" — only 17% answered some form of "Yes", and it means we are called go and make disciples of all the nations. 1



Asked another way, when given a multiple-choice list of Bible passages, 37% were able to correctly identify Matthew 28:18-20 as one of the sources of what we call The Great Commission!

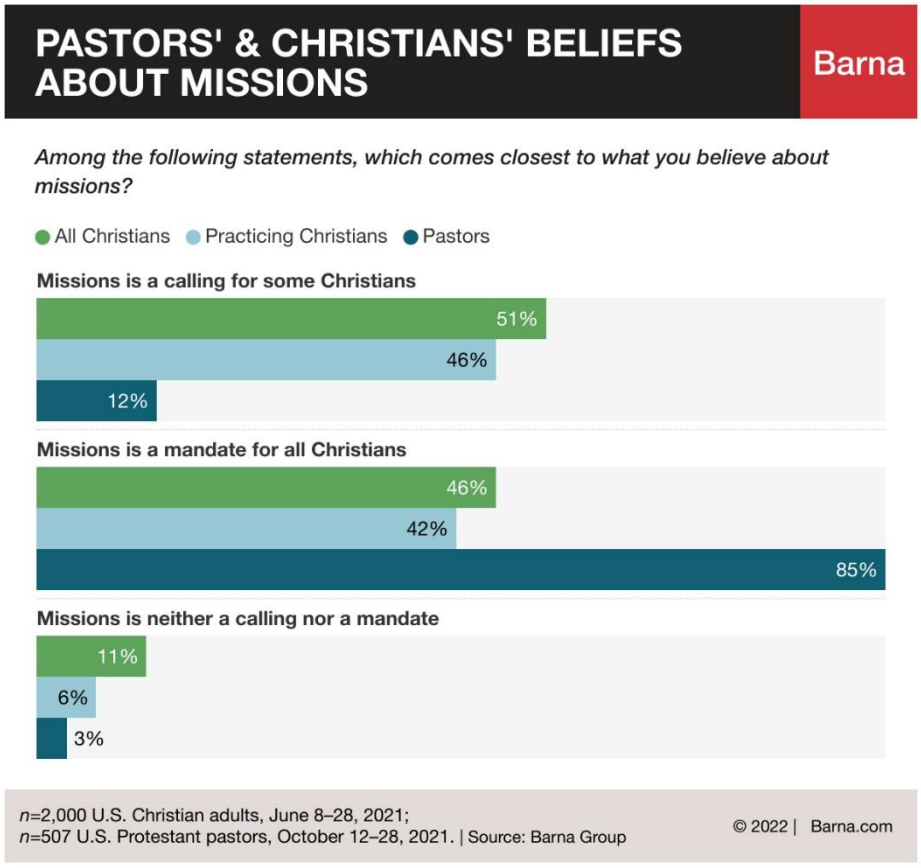
I don't know about you, but for me slightly more than 1/3 getting this right from a multiple-choice list isn't a ringing endorsement of consistent, Biblical preaching and teaching!

> **"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"**
>
> **— Matthew 28:18-20**

Barna's most recent deep dive into global missions attitudes brought to light what they call "The Great Disconnect". Their survey of active church attenders across denominational lines brought to light this surprising result: "85% of Pastors View Missions as a Biblical Mandate, but church members aren't so sure…. New Barna data reveals Christians may find exceptions in Jesus' parting command; they tend to believe missions is a calling for some (51%), not a mandate for all (25%).

On the other hand, the vast majority of pastors (85%)—regardless of denomination—say missions ***is*** work that all Christians participate in.

This is a profound difference, with pastors nearly doubling practicing Christians and more than tripling Christians in general with their agreement that missions is a mandate for every Christian." 2



Training in "how" God's call to the nations is the responsibility of all Christians, whether through praying, sending, giving or going, is important! How ***DO*** we connect personally and practically with God's primary task? We have lots of resources on this and is a topic for another blog. But first it's essential to discuss this Great Divide as congregational leaders! Is God's call to go and make disciples of all the nations a ***MANDATE FOR ALL*** or is it simply a ***CALLING FOR SOME***?

> Another facet of the Barna survey gives a clue. The authors sharing the results wrote, "Among Christians who can correctly identify the Great Commission, 61 percent view missions as a mandate, pointing to a correlation between scriptural context and perception of a missional assignment. We also see that those who view missions as a mandate for all believe a biblical understanding of missions is essential for their church's involvement in missions." 3

The surveys identify the connection between understanding the Biblical context / teaching and recognizing the explicit mandate. This should not be a surprise for confessional Lutherans who confess (in some form) that we "believe, teach, and accept the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the sole authoritative source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life." 4

Confessional Framework

Our congregations have the confessional framework to build a bridge across this "Great Divide" because we look to Scripture as the "sole authoritative source and norm"! What does God's Word teach about the Great Commission? We start the conversation and guide the discussion with Scripture, not the funds available in our budget, the size or location of our congregation, or even the strong opinions of a vocal few at an annual meeting!

> What we should do or could do in practical terms to reach the nations also should not be based on recent global mission experience (more likely lack thereof). We don't know what we don't know! In fact, we don't know what we don't know that we don't know! Remember, Global Mission was seriously flawed and misguided in the predecessor church body many come from.
>
> I encourage you to check out the recent Barna article noted here — in your council, mission team, or other venue, consider doing your own survey.

Among the following statements, which comes closest to what you believe about missions?

- Missions is a calling for some Christians.
- Missions is a mandate for all Christians.
- Missions is neither a calling nor a mandate.

Then start with the Word of God,
knowing there are available resources to go forward!

God's command to take the Gospel to the nations is worth taking seriously and pursuing with excellence!

For more information, contact Pastor Bill at:

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Rev. Bill Moberly, director of Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM), helps churches with global mission outreach. He authored Igniting a Passion for Missions: A Guide for Church Leaders. He and wife Sally have 7 children, 23 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren, and have traveled to 23 countries to share the Gospel and equip leaders.

Contact Bill: pastorbill@alwm.org

Links:

Barna: https://www.barna.com/

1: https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/

2: https://www.barna.com/research/missions-mandate/

3: https://www.barna.com/research/missions-mandate/

4: https://www.lcmc.net/statement-of-faith/231