

GUIDE FOR LOCAL CHURCHES ON



Caring for Missionaries On-the-Job



THE BIG IDEA

While mission agencies have a responsibility to provide “member care,”ⁱ caring for missionariesⁱⁱ is not only, or even primarily, the responsibility of mission agencies.

When a congregation sends out missionaries they extend their church’s ministry beyond their immediate cultural and geographical context. This partnership means the missionaries do not cease to belong to their sending church,ⁱⁱⁱ or are simply absent friends, but should remain valued members of their church, albeit in another place. Therefore, a sending church should continue its pastoral care for these distant brothers and sisters.

Due to the unique practical and spiritual needs of each cross-cultural ministry, **churches need to be informed, proactive and creative in their care for their missionaries.**

A healthy relationship between a sending church and its missionaries will a rewarding and enriching two-way process, keeping the church abreast of God’s wider purposes and giving an increasing awareness of cross-cultural and global mission.



TIPS & EXAMPLES

1. Keep in touch through two-way communication

- **Plan and be proactive** in maintaining contact with missionaries
- **Do not rely on individuals’** relationships with the missionaries to sustain the church’s relationship with them. While church members may initially be motivated to write emails and share news, this novelty can wear off, and key contacts may leave the church, causing missionaries to return to a group of strangers.
- Church leadership can appoint a mature and reliable person to **be the link** between missionaries and the church; this link needs to be regularly reviewed and renewed
- Be creative in providing **ways for the whole congregation to connect** with missionaries (e.g. Skype conversations, video messages, circulated missionary newsletters/emails etc.), and missionaries with the congregation (e.g. emailing them

church directories and church meeting minutes, providing online links to recorded sermons etc.)

- Understand how your missionaries communicate best and the **pressures** on them that can restrict/reduce communication
- Treat prayer letters/**newsletters** as a personal communication, even if it has obviously been sent/emailed to a whole congregation or list of people – writing these can involve considerable time, thought and effort for missionaries
- Respect missionaries' requests for careful handling of **sensitive information** – the work of missionaries in places where Christians are persecuted or restricted can be seriously jeopardised if information falls into the wrong hands

2. Know their concerns

- **Follow missionaries' lives** with detailed interest – how are they finding language study, the climate, strange food, the new people and culture, and the work they've been called to?
- The missionary may be reticent about sharing certain things – link people may need to **probe gently** about homesickness, loneliness, relationship issues, special needs
- The church may be able to alleviate missionaries' **concerns about family** they have left behind by caring for them in the missionaries' place. If a major difficulty arises in the missionaries' family at home, the church could be asked to help pay for an unscheduled journey home.
- Occasionally, the missionary may share difficulties with those they trust. While **confidentiality is vital**, a major problem may require church leaders to talk with the relevant mission agency and/or visit the missionary.

3. Pray for them

- Include **regular prayer** in the main church services and prayer meetings with frequent short news updates
- Organise **special times of prayer** for missionaries' specific needs
- **Foster an intercessory group** who feel called to stand in the gap for each missionary

4. Finances

- The church's **financial commitment** is generally settled before the missionary leaves, but **reviewing** this throughout the missionary's service to account for inflation, changes in circumstances etc. is important
- **Special needs or projects** may arise during a missionary's service, and the church needs to have a clear policy and generous spirit for these occasions

5. Special blessings

- Find creative and **helpful ways to bless** missionaries according to their needs
 - Many missionaries worship in a second language, so they may appreciate Christian music CDs, recorded sermons, devotionals and Christian books
 - Send them packages of items that they cannot access in their context (e.g. tubes of Vegemite, Wheatbix, Australian magazines and DVDs)
- **Remember special events**
 - Celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, allowing sufficient time for parcels to arrive by the correct date
 - Celebrate their children’s birthdays and school accomplishments, remembering that children may be living away from their parents for schooling
 - Missionaries can miss family and special traditions at Christmas and Easter time, especially in places where these celebrations are not observed by the local culture; so consider how the church may share joy and solidarity with them
 - Find ways to include missionaries in special church events (anniversaries, commissioning of church leaders, funerals, baptisms, weddings etc.)
 - As a church, consider celebrating the special days of the cultures where missionaries live (e.g. Chinese New Year, independence days), as an act of solidarity with missionaries and the national churches,^{iv} and as an opportunity to inform the congregation about the missionaries’ context
- **Visit them** in their cross-cultural contexts
 - Send representatives of the church (in small numbers) to be a blessing and to better understand their situation, rather than to evaluate their work – focus on listening and praying with them
 - Make every effort to limit the disruption to their lives and ministry – ask them when the best time to come would be
 - Avoid causing a financial burden; suggest staying at commercial accommodation rather than expecting missionaries to share their home

6. Real Examples:

- **“Discernment and Development:** How one church helps guide present and future workers.” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 9, Iss. 9, 2014.
<http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Discernment-Development.pdf>
- Ellen Livingood. **“Powerful Praying Churches – 1.”** Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 6, Iss. 3, 2011. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Churches-Praying-1.pdf>

- Ellen Livingood. “**Powerful Praying Churches – 2.**” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 6, Iss. 4, 2011. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Churches-Praying-2.pdf>
- “**Stories from the frontline.**” <http://www.globalconnections.org.uk/churches/global-mission/support/stories-from-the-frontline>
- “**Second Career Workers – 2: Mobilizing the Boomer Generation.**” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 4, Iss. 11, 2009. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/SecCar2.pdf>



HELPFUL RESOURCES

1. “**Missionary Care: Where Does a Church Begin?**” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 9, Iss. 3, 2014. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Missionary-Care.pdf>
2. <http://www.missionarycare.com/> - offers a range of e-books, brochures and resources on caring for missionaries
3. Glover Shipp and Bob Waldron. “**How to Care for Your Missionaries.**” https://www.mrnet.org/system/files/library/how_to_care_for_your_missionaries.pdf
4. “**Praying for mission partners**” [i.e. missionaries]. <http://www.globalconnections.org.uk/churches/global-mission/support/praying-for-mission-partners>
5. “**Guidelines for Good Practice in Member Care.**” Global Connections, UK. http://www.globalconnections.org.uk/sites/newgc.localhost/files/codes-and-standards/global_connections_member_care_guidelines.pdf
6. “**Missionary Care Services: How specialized coaches and counselors supplement church and agency care.**” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 7, Iss. 10, 2012. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Miss-Care.pdf>
7. Ellen Livingood. “**Missionary Accountability: Wrestling with the Church’s Challenge to Practice it Well.**” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 2, Iss. 11, 2010. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Accountability.pdf>
8. Ellen Livingood. “**Revisiting Advocate Teams.**” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 3, Iss. 7, 2008. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/A-Teams.pdf>

ⁱ **Member care** – the intentional care of missionaries by mission agencies and churches. This involves preparation for cross-cultural service, monitoring their physical, emotional and spiritual needs while on cross-cultural and home assignments. It also involves assisting them through transition periods such as Re-entry to their passport country after service. Agencies have a duty of care for their members, but this should be provided in support of the pastoral care provided by sending/support churches.

ⁱⁱ **Missionary/missionaries** - a person/family who has been commissioned by their sending church(es) and/or mission agency to be explicitly dedicated to the work of cross-cultural ministry. It indicates someone who is gifted, set apart and trained/prepared for cross-cultural service, and so serves a particular role in the global Body of Christ. While every follower of Jesus is called to be His witness wherever they are, some are specifically lead to cross cultural and geographical boundaries to share the gospel with those who could otherwise not comprehend its message.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Sending/supporting church(es)** – the church or churches who have commissioned and sent out a missionary/family to serve as their representatives in another culture/location. Generally, a missionary/family will have one main sending church, which is often (but not always) the one they were fellowshiping with before leaving to begin their cross-cultural ministry. Supporting churches are other churches who have agreed to support the missionary/family financially and prayerfully. These churches are often visited by missionaries/families on home assignment.

^{iv} **National/indigenous churches** – congregations consisting of the local people, hopefully lead by local people and worshiping/serving in culturally appropriate ways (i.e. not led by foreigners/expats according to foreign/"Western" methods).