



*Praying and labouring so that Africa “will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”
Hab 2:14*

MANI MEMBER CARE NETWORK

Written by Marina Prins (MANI Member Care Coordinator)

1. Introduction

Missionaries play a key role in reaching the least reached people groups, but their effectiveness is often hindered by insufficient and ineffective care. Over the years mission initiatives have taken place at a cost the cost of people returning prematurely from the field, because they were not well cared for. Because of this need a special ministry, called Member Care, has been developed around the world over the last 20 years.

According to the Global Member Care Network Board (part of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance)¹ Member Care can be described as: “The ongoing preparation, equipping and empowering of missionaries* for effective and sustainable life, ministry and work (*according to local/regional definition).

Member Care addresses all aspects of well-being of missionaries and their dependents. It includes spiritual, emotional, relational, physical and economic matters. Member Care addresses the needs of single people, couples, families and children. It seeks to empower missionaries to make healthy choices by offering ongoing training, resourcing and equipping in all these areas. It is integral to all aspects of mission including leadership, logistics, spiritual formation, and church life. It begins with selection and continues throughout the missionary life cycle to re-entry or retirement and beyond.

The responsibility for Member Care rests with the sending agency, the sending church, the receiving church, leadership (home/field), the team, families, individual supporters, competent Member Care providers and the individual missionaries themselves. Those providing Member Care will seek to develop competence in all relevant areas through ongoing learning, networking and resourcing. They will serve the mission community with humility, integrity and compassion, recognizing their own weaknesses and dependence on God’s grace and gifting.”

2. Member Care – A Biblical Responsibility

At its core Member Care is the Biblical responsibility to care for each other. There are numerous “one another” verses in the New Testament, which command us, urge us and encourage us to care for one another in different ways (“Love *each other*.” (John 15:17),

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Email: membercaremc@gmail.com

“...serve *one another* in love.” (Gal 5:13b), “Carry *each other’s* burdens...” [Gal 6:2a]). In this sense Member Care is part of our responsibility as Christians towards each other. This responsibility does not only apply to Member Care, but to all areas of our daily lives as followers of Christ. If, however, it applies to all of us who are followers of Christ Jesus – how much more does it not apply to our attitude and actions towards those we have sent out to the frontline of the battle against darkness?

Member Care is not about replacing God as the Ultimate Caregiver. It is not about missionaries neglecting their own responsibility to take care of themselves. It is about finding ways in which we as caregivers can take preventative action so that missionaries will be effective and well cared for and not returning prematurely because of a lack of care. The aim is to care for and build up missionaries in such a way that they will be able to live and minister as spiritually healthy and effective individuals. The concept is not new, what is new, is the world-wide organised attempt to develop and establish Member Care as a central part of missions.

Member Care is a continuous awareness of our responsibility to care for one another. It requires commitment, time and money. According to Pollock (1997: 2)² we were given a Great Commandment (to love one another) and a Great Commission (to make disciples). But sometimes in our zeal to respond to the one, we ignore or make light of the other. As Pollock puts it: “The Great Commission cannot be fulfilled without obedience to the Great Commandment.”

3. The Role of The Church

The church in Africa has the potential to make a significant contribution in sending and caring for missionaries. Mission organisations should not be excluded, but partnerships should be formed between churches and organisations.

The question is however: are we prepared to send and care for these missionaries effectively? Missionaries should be trained, prepared, sent to the field and being cared for continuously in a responsible and proper way.

4. The Importance and Foundation of Member Care

Member Care is important not because missionaries necessarily have more or unique stress, but rather because missionaries are strategic. They are key sources of blessing for the unreached (O’Donnell, 2001:221)³.

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The foundation of Member Care lies in the words of Christ in John 13: 34-35: “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

5. MANI Member Care development from 2006 to 2012

The first MANI Member Care Group met during the MANI 2006 Consultation in Kenya. This was followed up by Member Care meeting at MANI meetings in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

In 2008 Marina Prins was officially nominated as the MANI Member Care Coordinator to represent MANI on the Global Member Care Network Board which is functioning as part of the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Association. Within MANI she is responsible for the development of Member Care Networks in Africa. The first Global Member Care Network conference will be in April 2012 in Chiang Mai, Thailand where Marina will again represent MANI Member Care. Other participants from Africa at the conference include Roger Brown (Kenya), Anisa Moosa (Zambia) and Chantal Tehe (Côte d'Ivoire).

Since its start the MANI Member Care Network was looking at ways in which Member Care Networks could be developed in the different regions of Africa. One way of linking Member Care providers in Africa, was through the Africa Member Care Network newsletter that has been sent out every two months. Seeing that Africa is so big and diverse, the ideal would however be to have a Member Care Network for each region, similar to the regions in which MANI has divided Africa.

The aim of the MANI Member Care Network is not to duplicate what is already being done in the different regions, but rather to take hands and encourage existing networks and development and to network as far as possible by linking people from the regions with each other.

In 2011 Marina Prins had discussions with Marion Dicke, Regional Coordinator of the Mobile Member Care Team West Africa (MMCT). They are based in Ghana, and serving West Africa in terms of Member Care through equipping, resourcing, networking, short term counselling and debriefing following trauma (www.mmct.org). Their focus is not only on expatriate missionaries, but at present their focus is specifically on national missionaries and how they can serve them. Currently one of their staff is Patience Ahmed from Nigeria who has many years of mission experience and who has recently pursued her master's degree in counselling. The Mobile Member Care Team has already started to establish a Member Care Network, consisting of people in West Africa who have been doing some of their courses and people whom they have contact with. MMCT is aware of the huge needs of Francophone WA, and have begun to do some workshops in French, although there is a long way to go.

The outcome of these discussions was that a proposal was endorsed by the MANI leadership that The Mobile Member Care Team (West Africa) as from now will be the reference point for MANI Member Care in West Africa.

In the months to come a similar strategy would be followed for the other regions – either linking with existing Member Care teams or explore the possibility of initiating similar teams.

6. The Africa Member Care Network

Since March 2004 Marina Prins has been sending out the Africa Member Care Network (AMCN) email Newsletter. The Africa Member Care Network is an interagency affiliation of colleagues with Member Care responsibility. Our purpose is to help provide and develop Member Care resources in Africa. This bi-monthly Email Forum is a service dedicated to glorify God through networking, discussion and sharing information on issues related to Member Care in Africa. Currently 201 people are subscribed to this AMCN email newsletter.

7. What are the next steps?

- 7.1 We need the MANI country coordinators to ensure that Member Care is seen as an integral part of the National Initiative in each country.
- 7.2 We need names of people already involved in taking care of missionaries within each country.
- 7.3 Further develop a Member Care Network for each MANI region in Africa.

We need your assistance please:

We would appreciate it very much if you can send us the names of people in your country responsible for Member Care by taking care of missionaries.

Please email their names and contact details to:

Marina Prins (MANI Member Care Coordinator) at membercaremc@gmail.com or africamembercarenetwork@gmail.com

Thank you very much for your assistance.

God bless

Marina Prins

References

1. Global Member Care Network : www.globalmembercare.org
2. Pollock, D. C. (1997) Developing a Flow of Care. *Interact*, October 1997, 1-6.
3. O'Donnell, K. (2001) Going global: A Member Care model for best practice. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No.2, 212-222.