

GUIDE FOR LOCAL CHURCHES ON

Caring for Missionaries on Home Assignment



THE BIG IDEA

Home assignment (or furlough) is a period of time, generally a number of months, when missionaries visit their passport countriesⁱ and sending/supporting churchesⁱⁱ to reconnect and recharge before returning to cross-cultural service. This time is **an opportunity for mutual blessing** for missionaries and their sending/supporting churches.

However, this period often presents many competing priorities for missionaries. It is often a pressured time of meetings, visits and other commitments. It is not an uncommon requirement of missionaries to divide their time in Australia between a number of locations and supporting churches and individuals/families/groups.

While the whole period will not be a holiday, missionaries do need times of rest and revitalisation while they are in Australia. Ideally, when the time comes for your church's missionaries to return to their cross-cultural contexts, they will leave Australia fit, relaxed, with **strong and loving links** with supporters, and knowing that your church is standing behind them financially and spiritually.



TIPS & EXAMPLES

1. Assisting missionaries in preparing for home assignment:

- **Understand** that missionaries come on home assignment with mixed feelings – looking forward to seeing family and friends, but also leaving other friends and colleagues behind.
- Understand that missionaries still carry responsibility for the work they have been doing, and may be apprehensive about changed situations in Australian culture and their sending churches.
- **Reassure and encourage** missionaries by having a link person contact them well before the home assignment is due.
- **Inform** missionaries of any changes that have happened since their last time in Australia, and work with them to find ways to deal with these challenges (e.g.

changes in church structure/culture/leadership, national/state laws, technology, education, cultural norms, slang/jargon etc.).

- **Communicate with sending agencies** about the expectations of the agency regarding home assignment.
- Together with mission agencies and missionaries, help to **organise practical needs**, for example:
 - Pick up from the airport
 - Accommodation
 - Stocking the cupboards and fridge and/or have someone go shopping with them – the quantity and variety of foodstuffs available in Australian shops can be bewildering and overwhelming after living with less choice in another country
 - The use of a car
 - Schooling for children
 - Extra financial gifts may be appreciated to help with these and other practical needs (e.g. clothing, a holiday)

2. Assisting missionaries in achieving the objectives of home assignment:

- Missionaries should seek to **renew and strengthen relationships**, including relatives (not all of whom may be Christians).
 - Take care that the church does not monopolise the missionary's time and cause family resentment.
- Missionaries need to **reconnect with the local church family**.
 - Do not put them on a pedestal – missionaries are normal people serving in a difficult task in the power of God.
 - Provide opportunities to serve in the local church beyond merely reporting on their work overseas.
 - Provide time to fellowship and relax with the church family.
 - Allow missionaries to both share with existing supportersⁱⁱⁱ and build new friendships and partnerships.
 - Include the children of missionaries – encourage other children to engage with them, and value their cross-cultural experiences.
- Home assignment is the ideal opportunity to **attend to needs** which can often be better and more cheaply met in Australia (e.g. medical, optical and dental care; upgrading of professional skills).
 - Help schedule these things in early so they do not get squeezed out later.

- Assist missionaries with finding quality professional help and making appointments, remembering that missionaries may not know about changes in services or processes.
- Home assignment is also a time for **spiritual and physical refreshment**.
 - Bless missionaries by providing the time, and perhaps the finances, to attend conferences, courses or retreats.
 - Missionaries may have pastoral needs, so provide unhurried time with pastoral staff (this may be difficult if adequate pastoral contact has not been maintained between home assignments).
- During home assignment, missionaries, church leadership and sending agencies may take time to **strengthen partnerships** by conferring on policies and relevant issues.
 - Also organise a time of in-depth sharing with church leaders and the mission committee to enable everyone to catch up with changes and gain deeper insights into their cross-cultural work.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

1. Ellen Livingood. “**The Home Assignment Triangle.**” Catalyst Services Postings, Vol. 3, Iss. 5, 2008. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/H.A.-Triangle.pdf>
2. Ellen Livingood. “**When Missionaries Come To Town:** How to make the most of home-assignment visits.” Catalyse Services Postings, Vol. 10, Iss. 4, 2015. <http://catalystservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/When-Missionaries-Come.pdf>
3. “**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>

ⁱ **Passport country/culture** – The country on a missionary’s or MK/TCK’s passport. This is generally the location of the missionary/family’s sending church(es), and often (but not always) the place they will return to once their current cross-cultural service comes to a close.

ⁱⁱ **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.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Supporters** – individuals or churches who have explicitly committed themselves to financially and/or prayerfully support a particular missionary/family.