

Creatively Caring For Your Missionaries

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

– Philippians 4:17

By Laura Dougherty

mtw[®]
Mission to the World

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Propel the Missionary, Propel the Gospel

As missionaries in Peru, we enjoyed having nationals into our home so that we could share our way of life with them. We ate, prayed, worshiped, and invested in each other together. One of my favorite interactions, however, was when our guests pointed to a bulletin board on our wall that was crowded with about 50 different photos of individuals and churches. “Who are these people?” they would ask. And we had the privilege to respond that those were our North American brothers and sisters in Christ who, through their care and support of our family, were making our ministry in Peru possible.

Indeed, those individuals and congregations, big and small, propelled the good news through us to the people of Peru through their intentional and creative care of our family—care that began before we ever left for Peru. Many of those families had shown us what gospel hospitality looked like, walked with us in our spiritual journey, and bent over backwards to help us have a smooth transition to the field. Our own experience tasting the rich blessings of participation in the universal body of Christ enabled us to herald the kingdom of God passionately and authentically to those who were lost and longing for a redemptive community to belong to.

Possibly the most compelling message a Christ follower has to offer the world is their own experience of the good news—their own incarnate working out of the gospel through the ups and downs of life. This is where the role of the sending body comes in. As missionaries are proclaiming the good news in remote parts of the world, their sending bodies are uniquely positioned to proclaim the good news to them in both word and deed. This pipeline of love, care, and spurring on, in turn, fosters gospel ministries born out of both conviction and personal experience.

Cross-cultural disciples who are rooted in the body of Christ and refreshed regularly by it will naturally exude a calm confidence and joy that speaks loudly of the refreshing reality they have come to proclaim. *Quality care of missionaries wells up as good news joyfully shared and facilitates a harvest of global kingdom engagement.* Truly, the spiritual strength and encouragement that a creatively caring sending body can nurture within their sent ones produces a striking dynamic that the peoples of the world search desperately for.

In addition to cultivating this non-verbal message within the missionaries themselves, sending churches have a unique opportunity to demonstrate the nature of Christ’s body before the world as they hold up and spur on their cross-cultural workers from afar. Community and interdependence are not only integral and beautiful aspects of life in God’s kingdom, but they are dynamics that all image bearers intrinsically long for. Naturally, this is an opportunity for missionaries and their sending bodies to collaboratively represent the gospel to the people of the world. There are many ways (both on-site and from afar) for sending bodies to step into this.

From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Eph. 4:16

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35

Conversations with guests about our bulletin board were only the beginning. These same people witnessed the global body of Christ made manifest in our lives and the lives of our teammates in many ways during our time in South America. The devoted care of our sending churches back home translated the gospel message to our national friends and acquaintances in a way that went beyond the words we spoke. It showed them what a large and loving community they were being invited into. This booklet will share many of the creative ways that our sending churches have cared for us, as well as ideas contributed by other missionaries who have also been well cared for by their sending bodies.

Paul, a Product of Missionary Care

The New Testament presents us with evidence, via the life of Paul, that when God calls one of His children to take the good news around the world, He also raises up a sending body of believers to shoulder that calling alongside the missionary. God used the body of Christ to disciple, nurture, and equip Paul for ministry (Gal. 1). The church at Antioch fasted, prayed, commissioned, and sent him at the start of his missionary service (Acts 13-14).

Then, throughout Paul's ministry, he repeatedly attested to the beautiful participation in the body of Christ in which he greatly rejoiced (1 Cor. 16:17-18; Gal. 4:14; Phil. 1:8; 4:10-14; 1 Thess. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philem. 7). Paul's experience as a grateful recipient and participant within the body of Christ was clearly reflected in his letters to the churches which show how integral the love and care of the body of Christ is to the gospel message (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12-13; Gal. 6:1-6; Eph. 4:1-7; Phil. 2:1-5; Col 3; 1 Thess. 5:12-15).

Many Phases of Missionary Care

While sending agencies play a very important role in fulfilling the Great Commission and may attempt to fill the missionary care role when necessary, the local church can be much better equipped to care for and spiritually nurture a missionary through the many phases of their ministry. This care begins with discipling and guiding them before the missionary call is sensed and continues through their transition and resettlement back home. As sent ones approach a new phase, talking with their sending bodies about the best ways to partner through it can be immensely fruitful. (See the "Creative Care Ideas" section to read some practical ways to implement some of these things.)

Care That Grows Your Church

Churches that care well for their ministry partners around the world don't just yield fruit for the kingdom internationally, but within their own churches as well. A church that cares for and engages well with its missionaries will undoubtedly be a church that:

- **Sends** their own on mission regularly both locally and abroad, as fears of isolation, inadequacy, and failure are lessened through watching the body of Christ rally around their sent ministers of the gospel.
- **Gives** sacrificially toward ministry needs as their connection to missionaries fosters a growing understanding of and burden for ministerial needs not only on the field but in their own church context as well.
- **Grows in faith** through seeing the gospel play out in the life of missionaries who are learning to live in dependence upon the Lord for all things.
- **Prays** often as they are motivated by God's regular response to prayers for the missionary and his or her ministry.
- **Unites** to rally around the needs and victories of the missionary they have sent and jointly cared for.

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What Types of Care Do Missionaries Want?

Missionaries preparing for their service may not initially know what type of care will be most helpful for them on the field. It can be difficult to anticipate missionary life when you have never done it before. However, missionaries usually appreciate proactive offers of care from their own sending body that go beyond what they would typically want from other churches that partner with them.

For example, missionaries may appreciate a monthly phone call with an advocacy team from their sending church (advocacy teams explained under “Maintain Regular Contact”), however it could easily be overwhelming and unhelpful if 10 supporting churches expected to engage with them at this level. Church missions’ committees or representatives can prayerfully develop a basic level of care which they would like to offer to all their missionaries and a higher level of care for families sent out from among their own congregation. (Of course, in situations where a missionary’s own sending body is not able to provide a significant level of support, God may lead another church to step up and fill the gap.)

Caring for Single Missionaries

Many missions agencies estimate that single missionaries make up one third of the U.S. missions force. However, sometimes churches and supporters are unintentionally oriented toward caring for missionary couples and families. In the following pages there are places that list ways churches can specifically support single missionaries. But more than anything, we want to provide a gentle reminder to give them as much respect and attention you would a missionary couple or family.

Remember that the Bible highly values singleness and Scripture is full of stories about single men and women contributing to God’s plan of redemption in significant ways. They are and always have been crucial to Christ’s mission.

Creative Care Ideas

On the following pages you will find a list of many different practical ways that sending churches have cared for missionaries in recent years. These are by no means prescriptive for every sending church, nor would it be prudent for any single church to attempt to care in all the ways listed. However, we hope this will help sending bodies to brainstorm about the ways that God could use them to care for their missionaries. Also, it should be noted that these are ideas for churches to work toward together—not for an individual missions representative to carry out alone. Our prayer is that this collection of ideas will serve to energize your church’s mission effort and certainly not to bring any level of pride or shame about ways that they are or are not equipped to serve missionaries.

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...” Rom. 12:4-6a

Help Future Missionaries Find Opportunities to Use Their Gifts

Missionary care starts with the church family helping the future missionary along in their journey toward missionary service from before they even sense that call. Through nudging all church members to grow in missional living and stewardship of their gifts churches often unknowingly guide future missionaries toward the ministry that the Lord is preparing them for. Every deliberate offer of insight, accountability, and helpful feedback regarding individual calling and ministry potential is a seed planted that the Holy Spirit could mightily use to grow the kingdom. This role of the home church is of utmost importance.

Hold Missionaries Accountable to Spiritual Growth

As future missionaries are preparing for their service on the field, they need their church to shepherd them toward awareness and growth in their areas of weakness. A sending body is best suited to discern where growth may be needed for an individual missionary, to walk alongside them in developing a growth plan, and to provide accountability to that growth. Helping a missionary learn habits of growth before they transition to the field will set them up for resilience and a more dynamic presentation of the gospel playing out in their own life.

This role of the sending church continues after the missionary's transition to the field as well. During the initial years on the field, nationals and missionary teammates may not have the level of understanding and rapport required to speak into the missionary's life, so a missionary's sending church may still carry the primary shepherding role in their life. It certainly takes extra intentionality, but regularly checking in with the missionary to pray, encourage, and hold them accountable to personal growth is a ministry that can yield incredible fruit as well as guard against spiritual attack and ministry ineffectiveness (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

Modern technology provides us many ways to facilitate regular accountability to growth for missionaries. Two principles to keep in mind, however, are:

1. The facilitator must be committed to pursue the missionary. (Missionaries generally don't want to be a burden and tend to err on the side of caution.)
2. The accountability facilitator should have a way to regularly debrief on these check-in times with someone else in leadership at the home church (like a pastor, church elder, missions committee, etc.)—especially when a concern arises.

The regularity of these check-ins can be prayerfully determined in partnership with the missionary and revisited yearly as the missionary's need may increase or decrease. Potential people to provide accountability to your missionary are:

- A church elder
- A Christian counselor in the church
- An online peer accountability group with church oversight
- A missions committee member
- An adult Sunday school teacher or small group leader

Provide Hands-On Ministry Training

Often when missionaries arrive on a foreign field, the nationals assume that they are prepared and equipped to lead all aspects of ministry: preaching, teaching, leading Bible studies, leading congregational prayers, organizing church events, guiding a church session, spearheading mercy ministries, etc. The more opportunities that future missionaries have for getting their feet wet in these roles ahead of time, the better. Many circumstances lead foreign workers to need to step into new roles ministerially: The Lord opens new opportunities; the spiritual maturity of the nationals increases; ministry partners travel on home assignments; or tragedy creates a sudden need. Many missionaries attest to the reality that even those who don't plan on serving in a pastoral role may be called upon to lead in ways that they didn't expect. Consider encouraging future missionaries (even non-pastoral types) to gain experience in some of the following ways:

- Lead a Bible study
- Teach a Sunday School class
- Facilitate a home small group
- Lead a short-term mission trip
- Plan and execute a church event with others
- Serve as a deacon or elder
- Participate in a church committee
- Lead a prayer meeting
- Serve as a liaison with a mercy ministry for the church
- Practice leading some up-front aspects of the worship service (reading a Bible passage, giving announcements, introducing a speaker, etc.)
- Lead a youth event

Additionally, training on different technical aspects of church ministry could be a very helpful thing to a preparing missionary. Consider exposing the missionary to a basic understanding of how to run church's multimedia, social network-

ing, sound systems, sermon recording and uploading, etc. Depending on where the missionary is headed, these are all skills which the Lord could use to bless and propagate new and budding branches of His body who don't have access to knowledge or training on these topics.

Help Missionaries Discern Their Call

Churches carry the serious responsibility of making sure a missionary candidate is truly called. Just because someone is willing doesn't necessarily mean they are called to international service. There are many red flags that a home church can be on alert for when talking with a missionary candidate:

- They have never taken the opportunity to explore or exercise their gifting for cross-cultural work.
- Their motives for missions are unhealthy (escapism, wanderlust, to earn favor, etc.).
- They do not have a personal, growing relationship with Christ or clear understanding of the gospel.
- They need personal development in an area that may prevent them from completing the application process with a missionary agency (marriage difficulties, debt, etc.).
- They are significantly unsure about their own internal calling to missions in terms of personal desire or personal gifting.
- They are clearly not a good fit (yet) due to theological or other foundational issues.

Considerations to look for when speaking to single missionary candidates:

- They are secure in their singleness and their identity in Christ.
- They show signs of a clear call to missions and aren't going because they feel it is their only option.
- Their desire to find a spouse (if that is a desire for them) is secondary to their desire to obey God's call to missions.

Sometimes, churches need to care for missionary candidates from their churches by not supporting their missionary proposition. When churches detect red flags, they can advise missionary candidates to find ways of being involved in global missions from afar or pray with them for patience as they pursue missionary readiness. It is vitally important that missionaries are mature, solid, ready to go, etc., and the home church is responsible for helping them discern that call—or the lack thereof.

Raise a Strong Prayer Base for Them

Missionaries who hope to harness the Lord's power to touch hearts and lives with the hope of the gospel need a lot of prayer warriors—men, women, and children who will ceaselessly go before the Father on their behalf and on behalf of the lost whom they are reaching with the gospel. Small groups, Sunday school classes, or entire congregations can pray over missionaries in a variety of ways:

- Pray over them in person while they are with you.
- Pray over the missionary via a video call.
- Have a group from your church write out prayers for the missionary and share those written prayers with them for their encouragement.
- Form a midweek prayer group to intercede for your missionary and their ministry.
- Organize a 24-hour prayer chain for your missionary when they are launching a new ministry initiative or undergoing a stressful time.
- Send a few members from your church to visit the missionary for the purpose of praying over them, their family, their city, and their ministry sites.
- Encourage each family from your church to adopt a missionary and pray daily together for them, receive their prayer letters, and invite them over when they are on home assignment.

Help Them Discern Their Missional Direction

Throughout their service, missionaries will benefit from having church leaders or peers seek direction from the Lord with them. The missionary calling involves great vulnerability and dependence upon God, and so affirmation and encouragement from one's brothers and sisters in Christ is essential. Missionaries need the body of Christ to listen well as they process the Lord's leading in their life, to pray with them through decisions, and to counsel them as they seek to:

- Determine the right mission agency
- Find the right location of service
- Settle on the right ministry type
- Engage with the right missionary team
- Work out the nature of their role on the missionary team
- Recognize when a home assignment or time of refresh is needed

How to Pray for Missionaries

Shared by David and Jan Thomae

- Diligence in God's Word and faithfulness in prayer
- Protection from the evil one; stand firm in midst of temptation
- Strong marriages and close-knit families
- Children to be godly and well-adjusted, to love the host culture, and to have godly input in their lives from others
- Growing more like Jesus, learning from His Word
- Represent Jesus in such a way that others are drawn to Him
- Wisdom in daily use of time
- Energy, patience, and stamina for the long-haul
- Godly perseverance and encouragement, especially in adverse circumstances
- Joy in the Lord and in the ministry
- Aptitude for local language and cultural sensitivity
- Clear direction in ministry decisions
- True Christian community among team, national co-workers, and local church
- Gospel focus in resolving conflicts
- Comfort in being separated from friends and family, especially children and grandchildren
- Heart friends with whom to share burdens and joys; friends who initiate communication and not leave it up to the missionary
- Sacrificial and faithful prayer/financial partners with adequate financial support
- Open doors for the gospel and a fruitful harvest
- Finishing well whether that be to move to another field or for retirement

Provide Opportunities for Sharing Their Call With Others

The first ministry activity that a missionary takes on is speaking publicly about their calling and future ministry for the purpose of raising up financial and prayer partners. This can be a daunting task for someone who has never practiced that skill. The sending church can help provide a loving and encouraging environment to help new missionaries cultivate this ability. Missionaries may appreciate speaking first to a smaller group and then gradually practicing with larger groups. Providing different types of speaking settings and lengths of time can be helpful too. Missionaries receive all different types of opportunities for sharing their call, and will need to learn to adapt their message accordingly:

- Speaking to different age groups
- Speaking for just three minutes or 45 minutes
- Speaking to just men or just women

- Speaking in response to on-the-spot questions (like a missionary panel or interview) or giving a prepared presentation
- Speaking with a visual aide or speaking without one

Network With Potential Prayer and Financial Partners

As new missionaries set out to raise up ministry partners, sending churches often prove to be an invaluable help in connecting with groups of people who the Lord is raising up to be senders. In addition to facilitating opportunities to connect with their own congregation, church leaders can network with sister churches and parachurch ministries to advocate for the missionary.

Additionally, churches can encourage their members to advocate for the missionary in their individual circles of influence (neighborhoods, workplaces, clubs, extended families, etc.). Sending churches that take on the burden of raising ministry partners along with the missionary make such a huge difference in propelling the missionary to the field, and they also find great fruitfulness in raising missionally minded people in their context as well.

Consider helping your missionary network with the following groups:

- Sunday school classes and small groups in your own church
- Individual ministry areas of your church (singles, children, men, women, retired, events, mercy ministries, etc.)
- Parachurch ministries connected to your church (schools, college ministries, self-help groups, MOPs groups, etc.)
- Other churches in your city or state
- Neighborhood groups
- Local clubs and social groups
- Local philanthropists and entrepreneurs
- Groups with a vested interest in their target country or ministry type

Remember itinerating single missionaries. Unlike most married missionary couples, itinerating single missionaries don't have two sets of friends and connections. They often feel like they are tackling the daunting task of support raising alone. Intentional help in organizing speaking engagements and networking for single missionaries will make them feel supported and valued.

Help Missionaries Say Goodbye Well

A missionary's final weeks in their home country before departing for the field can be very stressful due to the logistics of moving, and yet it is incredibly important for them to have good time with those close to them before they leave. Sending churches have blessed their missionaries greatly by hosting send-off parties for them during their final weeks. There are many ways that this blesses missionary families and those close to them:

- It relieves pressure to meet individually with every friend and supporter.
- It allows the missionary to invite anyone they want to.
- It allows those with a gift for hospitality to bless the missionary using their strengths.
- Many different creative activities at this event could help those attending to express their love to the missionary family in an inviting and relaxed environment.

Ideas for a Send-Off Party

- A photo booth for taking a final picture with the missionary family (a silly accessory box could help lighten the mood)
- A note-writing station for expressing appreciation and prayers for the family
- A plaque (or other group gift) signing station
- Finger foods
- A slideshow of the missionary's church and community involvement
- A picture drawing station for children who would like to give a parting gift to the missionary
- A time for group prayer over the missionary. (Consider asking for two to three volunteers ahead of time so that those who really want to pray out loud can do so while others join silently.)
- Think of creative ways that different groups within the church might like to express their love to the missionary (A skit? A decorative cake? A song? Etc.)

In addition to a send-off party, help those closest to your missionary prayerfully consider how to continue their friendship. Suggest to a close friend of the missionary that they offer ongoing moral support from afar. Having a close friend or two who commit to stay in touch can be especially meaningful during the first years away, and encouragement in this from church leadership can be honoring to the friend as well.

Help With the Logistics of Moving

Consider offering help with some of the many logistics involved in moving to a different country:

- Packing
- Childcare while parents pack
- Cleaning their home either before or after they depart
- Lending a truck or van for transporting items to the airport or a storage site
- Providing boxes, travel-sized plastic bins, or suitcases
- Help loading the moving truck
- Provide meals or restaurant gift cards during the final days before departure
- Gift sky miles
- Visa gift card for purchasing food during travel
- Offer a ride to the airport
- Offer storage space for personal belongings they won't take with them

Maintain Regular Contact

For most churches it's helpful if there is a dedicated group responsible for maintaining communication with the missionary. That could be the missions committee, an advocacy team, a prayer circle, or some other small group (a Sunday school class, Bible study, fellowship group, etc.). The missionary should ideally talk with this group before they transition to the field to establish how often they will communicate. Regular contact will provide great moral support to the missionary and alert the church to specific needs as they arise. Below are a collection of ways that sending bodies have kept in close contact with their missionaries over the years:

- Phone, text, or video call occasionally to check in (whichever mode is preferred by the missionary).
- Rejoice and weep with the missionary. Silence from the home church can feel like turning away from them.
- Keep up with their prayer requests and follow up with them, responding to prayer letters even with very brief communications.

- Send Christmas cards to remind them that you're thinking of them.
- Children's Sunday school classes can communicate with the missionary children, send birthday and Christmas presents to them, and welcome them warmly during home ministry assignments.
- Keep up with the missionary's challenges. Some missionaries are more open than others about the hard aspects of missionary life.

Sometimes a very serious concern is brought up through close communication with a missionary. In such instances great wisdom and prayerfulness is needed to discern the correct response. Contacting the mission agency's Member Care Department is usually appropriate before reaching out to the missionary's teammates with a concern, as that could throw the missionary under the bus.

Missionary Advocacy Teams

Advocacy teams, or care teams, are groups of around six to 10 individuals who stand between the church and the missionary to advocate for the missionary to the church and to spearhead care efforts of the church for the missionary. These teams meet regularly for prayer and communication with the missionary, help coordinate housing, vehicles, and other logistical needs for the missionary while on home assignment, provide listening ears and moral support for the missionary from afar, visit the missionary for encouragement, and remind the church body regularly of prayer requests and other ways that the church can support the missionary. Having an advocacy team that is committed to your wellbeing and pursues you is an incredible lifeline for missionaries and can help them stay grounded through difficult seasons.

Advocacy teams also play an important role for sending bodies. In addition to alerting the church leadership to needs which may not be mentioned in prayer letters, they also provide a wonderful way for lay people to participate in the Great Commission. Serving on a missionary advocacy team is a great first step for someone sensing a call toward missionary service, and the regular interaction with a foreign worker will provide a valuable insight into missionary life. Many churches hold a commissioning service when they send out missionaries from their congregation, and some utilize this same service to commission an advocacy team for service to the missionary as well. This elevates the importance of the care team before the congregation and speaks volumes about the church's commitment to jointly fulfilling the Great Commission.

Visiting and Caring Physically

One of the things that makes missionaries feel most cared for is when their own pastor (or someone in a shepherding role for them) and his wife come to visit them specifically for providing encouragement and coming to better understand their context and lives. When someone comes to visit without expectations of being a tourist, but genuinely desires to understand and help the missionary, this speaks volumes and is so appreciated. Trips like this can bless missionaries through:

- Praying over the missionary and their ministry efforts.
- Attending ministry meetings and events with the missionary but with the intention of prayerfully watching and learning as he or she goes about their regular agenda.
- Bringing care packages from home. There are often items that missionaries cannot find in their service locations, so check ahead of time about what is desired.
- Bringing birthday and Christmas gifts that the missionary's family members may like to send from home.
- Taking them to dinner at a place of their choosing and listening to them share about their lives and how they are doing.

- Babysitting their children so that they can have time away as a couple. Or even pay for them to have a night in a nice hotel.
- Offering homeschool support, medical support, technical support, etc. (Whatever skills you may have to offer the missionary as you visit are appreciated.)
- Visiting during a time when they wouldn't normally be receiving guests. Missionaries are most lonely and available during those times, and it will be more obvious that you're there for them, not tourism.
- Going for moral support when the missionary is going through a difficult time. (Medical crisis, team conflict, etc.)

Mailing care packages to missionaries can be a significant way of blessing them as well, however it is important to coordinate this with the missionary ahead of time, because foreigners are often charged exorbitant customs fees to receive packages. Missionaries will be able to advise you on how to send goods that will be less likely to involve these fees. They may also be able to make you aware of shipping companies which will be more economical for their location.

Respond to Spiritual and Emotional Needs

Many missionaries struggle with believing the lie that they are alone and that no one really cares about how they are doing. When leaders from their sending body respond promptly to their communications and seek to be attentive listeners, this combats that lie and brings great reassurance. One missionary shared, "My leaders reminded me that the gospel I went out to proclaim is for me too! I needed to be reminded that the gospel meets me in my failures just as much as the nationals I was reaching."

When sending bodies are deliberate in caring regularly for their sent ones, they set themselves up to be a natural source of help and support in more disastrous circumstances such as moral failures or suicidal impulses. In these situations, the sending body must be prepared to offer swift and loving pastoral care. This will transpire more instinctively and be more readily received when a groundwork of rapport has been well established beforehand.

Offer Logistical Help From Afar

There are many little ways that sending bodies can provide support to missionaries from their home countries. These are small things that most missionaries will not pursue help with unless it is offered, but it can be a significant help to handle things that are not in the missionary's skill set or are cumbersome to orchestrate from overseas. Odd jobs that your missionaries may appreciate help with include:

- Writing prayer letters
- Recording promotional videos
- Virtual tutoring for children
- Technology help
- Financial planning help
- Home away from home for college-age kids
- Sending care packages to college kids
- Invite them to participate in a virtual Bible study
- Help with mailing Christmas cards
- Help caring for family members back in the U.S.
- Facilitate a virtual prayer meeting for the missionary and their prayer partners

Facilitate a Virtual Prayer Meeting

- Meet with the missionary to arrange a suitable time for the prayer meeting, discuss the meeting agenda, and receive a list of contacts to invite.
- Plan the meeting.
- Send an invitation listing the purpose, beginning and end times, a link to connect to the meeting, and a brief description of what to expect (Will they be asked to pray out loud? Will they be visible to others at the meeting? Etc.)
- Send a reminder with the meeting link to everyone the day of the meeting.
- At the meeting greet participants, introduce the missionary, explain how the prayer time will be orchestrated, and guide people through the process. You may choose to have the missionary share briefly about the prayer needs before going to prayer but be careful to guard time to actually pray. You can offer a question-and-answer time at the end for those who want to stay on the call longer.

Planning the Prayer Meeting:

What to pray for: Either target a specific need, guide people through thematic prayer for the missionary's personal devotion, health, family life, ministries, etc., or allow free-flowing prayer for whatever the Holy Spirit puts on people's hearts.

Who will pray: Designate people to pray ahead of time, ask for volunteers on the spot, or just pray popcorn-style inviting anyone to jump in. If it is a very large group of people gathering for prayer, it may be smoother to either have pray-ers designated ahead of time or utilize breakout rooms so people can pray in smaller groups.

What prayer resources to provide: Email or screen-share a prayer list to aide people in their prayer. Also, you could provide a list of scriptures to pray for the missionary.

Help Them Communicate With Supporters

Sometimes churches feel discouraged when missionaries do not communicate or connect well with them. This may be an opportunity to help the missionary in a struggle area. First, spend time praying for the missionary and seeking from the Lord what is most needed. Then, when you contact the missionary, do your best to communicate your love and concern for them, as missionaries are prone to feel shame about their communication skills.

Missionaries are not all the same, and while some have a gift for creating interesting prayer letters and videos, to others these things feel like overwhelming tasks. Consider offering to help the missionary develop some content to share with supporters. Do a Zoom interview and record and edit it for them to send out or offer to write a prayer letter based on your conversation. Better yet, help arrange for someone with videography skills from your church to visit the missionary and put together a short video on-site that could be shared with supporters.

Provide Support During Home Assignment

Many missionary agencies consider it a responsibility of the sending body to help their foreign workers find housing and transportation while they are on home assignment. This is a wonderful way to bless and care for missionaries in a physical way. Home assignments can be stressful times of constant travel, speaking engagements, lots of fast food, doctor's appointments, and attempting to cover bases back on the field from afar. Churches who come alongside missionaries to

help them logistically in these times truly incarnate the gospel to them in a refreshing way. Below are some of the ways that churches have cared for missionaries during home assignments that you might want to offer.

Providing for Basic Needs

- Providing housing
- Providing needed furnishings
- Providing vehicles
- Arranging for kids' schooling
- Helping with transportation to speaking engagements

Welcoming

- Taking missionaries to coffee and rejoicing and weeping with them
- Show sensitivity about saying "welcome home" to children who have lived most of their lives overseas
- Arranging a child buddy for missionary children when they visit their church
- Educating their church on what types of questions to ask (see list below)
- Providing busy activities for children when their parents are speaking at the church
- Taking them out for meals

Resourcing

- Helping missionaries locate appropriate resources needed for parenting, marriage issues, children's education, learning disabilities, etc.
- Gifting gym memberships, Costco memberships, gas money, movie gift cards, sporting event tickets, museum memberships, etc.
- Meeting their phone needs for a few days when they first arrived (arriving without a phone plan can be very stressful!)
- Have a mechanic in the church offer to check vehicles
- Other handymen have offering help (plumbers, electricians)--Having someone to trust is so reassuring!
- Providing gift certificates to clothing stores because clothing needs are different in the U.S. from many field locations, and missionaries sometimes don't own the right type of clothing for their home assignments
- Providing professional counseling

Including

- Inviting missionaries into their family and including them in activities such as small groups, Bible studies, book clubs, etc.
- Set up play dates for missionary children
- Paying for missionaries to attend church men's and women's retreats

Serving

- Providing groceries upon arrival
- Providing home cooked meals
- Lending a helping hand—babysitting, doing laundry, cleaning, with yard work, etc.
- Putting on a missionary retreat to love on and providing rest and refreshment to your foreign workers (even flying missionaries home from the field for this!)
- Asking genuinely about needs (one missionary expressed incredible gratitude for being provided an instapot to cook with!)

Gifting

- Asking them for an Amazon wish list to bless them at Christmas time
- Helping fund retreats, conferences, books, summer camps for kids, etc.
- Sending the couple on a getaway
- Arranging for a family vacation (beach house or mountain cabin)
- Lending toys for children to play with during their stay in the U.S. (often missionary kids must go several months without their things while they are on furlough)

Honoring

- Setting up a prayer meeting with friends and family to pray over missionaries before they return to the field
- Throwing wedding and baby showers for missionaries (and their grown children)
- Paying for debriefing for missionaries and their children

HMA is also a time when you can especially support and love single missionaries. Churches don't necessarily need to do anything different when caring for a single missionary on HMA than they would for missionary couples and families. However, after speaking to several single missionaries, here are some common pitfalls churches should try and avoid:

- Setting them up with other single people
- Asking about or fixating on their singleness (they may want to talk about it but it is a good idea to let them bring it up)
- Suggesting they get married or telling them that they will find a spouse someday
- Assuming they want to live with someone else (just ask them—some may want the company of a roommate, but many prefer to live alone)
- Expecting they have unlimited time and energy (it is true that single missionaries have more flexibility than missionary families but they still need the time and freedom to rest)

In addition to the tangible helps, a missionary's home church can make sure that someone close to them reaches out to get coffee and just listen to hear how they are doing and demonstrate interest and concern. Missionaries don't necessarily need lots of different people to do this, but it's incredibly supportive if someone does. Sharing our experience—both the ups and downs—with someone we trust can be incredibly restorative. Asking good questions is a great way to do this. The section below provides questions that missionaries have put forth as things they desire to be asked.

Good Questions to Ask a Missionary

- What are you most passionate about right now?
- What is your favorite time of the week?
- How have you seen God at work recently?
- How can we pray for each of your children now?
- Tell me about a national that you'd like us to pray for?
- What are some roadblocks to the growth of God's kingdom that you regularly see in your ministry?
- What can I pray for you right now?

Cultivate a Welcoming Church Culture

When churches foster a culture of sending and caring for foreign workers, this naturally generates a church culture that is encouraging to those visiting from the field. One missionary shared that she never felt awkward about asking people at church to consider supporting her ministry, because her church had such a strong understanding of and value for the missionary experience. She added that because her church was so invested in her ministry, when she returned on home assignments, she found members who not only had a sense of what sorts of questions to ask, but who seemed to actually love the people she had grown to love on her field of service.

Advise Them Regarding Changes in Their Calling

There are frequently times when missionaries need to reevaluate their calling on the field. Missionaries often feel very alone or unsure about their own judgment regarding their call at times of great stress or grief on the field. A sending body who has walked closely with them from the beginning is best equipped to guide missionaries in responding to new or difficult circumstances on the field and certainly adds great reassurance as well. Missionaries have attested to the incredible help that their care teams have been in warning them away from taking on responsibilities that would be unwise as well as in recognizing when their calling had been shifted elsewhere.

Care for Their Family Members

A missionary couple's ability to continue serving through middle-age and beyond often depends greatly on how much of a support system they see that their older kids and aging parents will have. Sometimes God calls families to transition home in this stage of family life. At other times, however, the Lord provides through churches who step up in a big way to meet these needs. Churches have done this through:

- Checking in regularly with the aging parents of missionaries and helping with yard work and house upkeep jobs
- Taking elderly parents of missionaries to doctor appointments or visit them in assisted living situations
- Welcoming a high school aged missionary kid into their home for a summer to experience life in the U.S. and work on getting a driver's license before moving here after high school
- Donating air miles so their college kids can visit them on the field, or so that missionary can visit their kids at college
- Adopting college kids whose parents are far away through regular prayer, sending goody boxes, offering holiday invitations, providing summer accommodations, checking in from time to time and reassuring the parents of how they are doing
- Taking grown missionary kids out for coffee and listening well as they adjust to life in their passport country

Help Them Reassimilate Into U.S. Culture

When the Lord leads missionaries to conclude their time serving internationally, the adjustment back to their home country can be a very difficult experience. For some it is even more trying than the initial adjustment to life on the field. Thinking for the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of missionaries in this season can be a great way to demonstrate the love of Christ to them:

- Ask what their needs are before they transition home, during their first weeks home, and again throughout their first couple years home. Transition and adjustment can take a very long time!
- Provide opportunities for them to share about their experience, both with your congregation and in more intimate settings with a good listener who cares.
- Offer pastoral counseling and care through the first year or two of their adjustment home.
- Help them find ways to serve and be appreciated in your church. While some returning missionaries will be ready for a break from ministry, others will feel lost without a defined role in the church.
- Help them connect to the social life of your church. They may not have as many friends and connections in your church as when they initially left to serve internationally. Integrating into small groups Bible studies, men's and women's ministries, and youth group can be hard!

Caring for Missionaries Sent by Other Churches

Care provided by a missionary's sending body is of primary importance for their well-being and effectiveness in ministry, but the best-case scenario involves many different churches and individuals caring for the missionary. Many missionaries have been blessed by other churches supplementing the care that their sending church is able to provide. When supporting churches reach out with a poll as to which types of care would be most needed and appreciated, missionaries always appreciate the initiative and may be struck by an area or two where they are lacking care.

APPENDICES

MTW's Policy on the Sending Body's Role in Missionary Care

The book of Acts sets forth the scriptural role of the church—the local church—as the sending authority and as the prayer and financial base for world evangelism. The responsibilities of these sending bodies, in consultation with the General Assembly's Committee on Mission the World, include recruitment, examining, training, support, commissioning, contact, and home ministry assignment.

- **Recruitment:** Sessions and presbyteries should actively seek God's wisdom in laying before persons in whom they recognize the gifts consistent to a missionary call. This call, of course, will either follow or create the individual's own call to missionary service (Book of Church Order 17-1). The church, by its challenge and discernment, must take seriously its role to motivate those of its own number to serve God internationally.
- **Examining:** It is the responsibility of the sending body to examine each missionary candidate thoroughly in the areas of call, life, and doctrine. It should seek to evaluate their gifts and calling and fitness for the missionary task and give them counsel and guidance as they seek God's will in missions. The session or presbytery will maintain basic oversight for his doctrine and morals and will seek ways of effectively carrying out this responsibility while the missionary is on the field.
- **The Call to a Particular Work:** After the sending body has called, examined, and approved a candidate for missionary service, a recommendation for missionary service should be sent to MTW. MTW may extend a call to a particular work to the candidate following their being approved for missionary service by CMTW. On the basis of this call, the sending body should proceed to ordain and commission the candidate.
- **Support:** It is clear that the sending churches in the book of Acts were involved in the support—prayer and financial—of their missionaries. When a session or presbytery encourages an individual to mission service, it accepts the responsibility to back up that person by prayer and giving.
- **Commissioning:** The sending body, the session or presbytery, should do the commissioning of missionaries.
- **Contact:** Following the above procedure, the church at home will feel far more involved in their missionaries' work. They came from them; they are supported by them; in a real sense their work is an extension of their own local or presbytery's ministry. A vital contact should be maintained between the missionary and the sending body. The session or presbytery should arrange to receive regular reports from its missionaries on the field. It should evaluate their work and seek to offer advice and encouragement. It must take seriously its basic oversight for their doctrine and morals.

Advancing in Missions: Missionary Care Considerations

On the Field

- **Missionary Care Advocate:** Consider forming a team or assigning a family/single to intentionally lead the church's care for each missionary unit. Make the expectations of this advocate clear on both sides. Prioritize missionaries who are sent out from your church.
- **Intentional Friendship:** There is a difference between a friend checking-in and a committee member checking-in. Reach out without an agenda. Send messages having nothing to do with missions. Send interesting articles. Maybe even send something funny. That said, we would want all our friends to grow in Christ, so don't ever bypass spiritual encouragement.
- **Intentional Prayer:** We are prone to not recognize the absolute importance of prayer.
- **Reply to Updates:** Reply to every update! The reply does not have to be long!
- **Pastoral Involvement:** Help your pastor do small things to care for the missionary, especially if the missionary is a member of the church. This can look like a short message that the pastor is praying for them or how a sermon the pastor is working on might apply to the missionary.

Furlough/Home Missions Assignment

Furlough can be a daunting undertaking for missionaries. They uproot their lives again. Imagine all the planning and work you would undertake knowing that you are moving somewhere for a year? Imagine not having a consistent place of your own where you were going? Coordinating schedules with partners, family, and friends is more complex than we appreciate. I haven't mentioned schooling for children yet. Here are some ways you can help ease the "weirdness" of Home Mission Assignment.

- **Planning:** Talk to them 6 months before they come home. Create the space to talk specifically about HMA. What are they expecting? What are they hoping? How are they planning for rest? Discuss how the church can help in practical ways. Do this early so that they know what they can expect. I highly recommend that mission teams create an HMA questionnaire.
- **Central contact:** It can help to have one primary contact at the church, an advocate, who works to relieve some of the coordination burden.
- **Transportation:** A long-term loaner car is best. Second best is a loaner car for a few weeks when they first arrive.
- **Housing:** The more permanent the better, but even if this is not available, they need help
- **Fun:** Help them plan a day of fun and a night out.
- **Make (new/old) connections:** If they have children, help them connect with other children. Remember that adults are not too different from children in this matter. Be a bridge to new relationships.
- **Speaking:** Fill their schedule, when they are ready, with opportunities to share about their ministry. Advocate on their behalf.
- **Debriefing:** There are different levels of debriefing. Be intentional to create at least one debriefing opportunity where the missionary knows they are safe and not rushed. This kind of environment may not involve the full committee. I recommend debriefing more than once and making sure to discuss their HMA.

Quick Visits

Know the nature of their visit:

- Fundraising
- Communication
- Personal/Family needs/errands
- Emotional rest

Respect their space if 3-4 apply. Find out how much they want to do and plan accordingly. Perhaps even help guard their anonymity. Refer to the furlough tips for some general ideas.

HMA or Quick Visit Sample Questions

- What are your hopes/goals/expectations for this visit?
- Families: will everyone in the family be with you?
- What dates will you be in town?
- What Sundays will you be in town?
- What are your major plans/trips?
- Do you need help finding transportation?
- Do you need help finding housing?
- Do you have any pet allergies?
- Do you have any food allergies?
- Who else are you in contact with at the church?
- What is/will be your primary contact information?

- List church leaders, ministries, individuals, and groups that you hope to speak with. (Or provide a list of options to share and have them circle the options.)
- Do you need us to help advocate for you? Ex. Doctor recommendations? School options?

General Tips (Obvious and Not-So-Obvious)

- Let them know they can make copies at church.
- Yes, care packages are still fun to receive.
- Remember that missionaries are oh, so normal and ordinary people. Putting them on a pedestal is bad for us and bad for them.
- Missionary care may be the most important role of a mission team.
- Small churches with small budgets can be the best at missionary care.
- The sending church should take a significant lead in providing hospitality for missionary visits and HMA.
- Pastors should empower missions teams to care for missionaries but avoid abdicating their role. Find an hour to be with them when they are in town.
- Missionary care starts long before the missionary leaves for the field!
- If the missionary has another sending church, it is ok to rely on them to provide primary care. You don't have to care for every missionary like you would your own, sent, missionaries.

Missionary Care Triangle

The Mission Agency: Mission agencies play a very important role in missionary care (or member care). Most mission organizations strive, imperfectly, to do member care well. MTW, for example, sees this as a top priority, mostly because Christ's love compels them, but also because it can prevent missionary attrition. There is a department dedicated to member care. MTW employs a full-time psychologist. Member care is a value that saturates almost every department within MTW. Teams and regions attend area retreats organized by the home office. The list of how agencies do member care is longer than this piece allows. However, member care is not all a mission organization does. Missionaries could not serve overseas without a mission agency. Consider the complex visa, tax, residency issues required to live in a foreign country. Imagine that complexity across 89 countries. These administrative duties are an important part of missionary care that local churches cannot manage. The tax implications in the US alone are too complex for the average local church. Missionaries need mission/sending agencies!

The Team: Local teams on the field also play a key role in missionary care. They have the closest proximity to the missionary. Ideally, the team is a primary source of spiritual community for each missionary unit on their team. Teams are an extension of the mission agency and therefore provide important accountability and counsel. That said, not every team is operating at full capacity or health and the team might, in some cases, be a primary reason a missionary needs spiritual care. Healthy teams with a vision, structure, and capacity for member care are the best place for missionary care to take place. When the team is a place for vulnerability, friendship and care, missionaries are most likely to thrive on the field. Missionaries need teams!

The Sending Church: At the end of the day, the sending church in the U.S. plays a vital role in missionary care. The mission agency is the employer. Team members are coworkers. Does anyone want to always share their deepest personal challenges with their employer or coworkers? In an ideal world, the missionary would feel safe to do this with their mission agency and team, but the Bible makes it clear that we don't live in an ideal world. This is why churches must engage with new missionaries well before they leave for the field. We can't shepherd people we don't know. As a member of the sending church, a missionary should be shepherded by their church in many of the same ways a local member would be shepherded. When the missionary hits a valley, and they will, because missionaries are just like everyone else (not super spiritual heroes) their home church should already know them. Playing catch up is not good care. Yet, a missionary is really hard to know when they are on the field, which highlights the importance of their sending church having a development and care plan before they leave the country, while they are on the field, and when they return home. Missionaries need a sending church!

Recommended Resources:

- **“Mind the Gaps: Engaging the Church in Missionary Care”** by David J. Wilson
- **“Mission Miracles and the Prayers of God’s People”** by Eleanor Fiol
- **“Praying for Your Missionary: How Prayers from Home Can Reach the Nations”** by Eddie Byun
- **“Serving as Senders: How to Care for Your Missionaries While They are Preparing to Go, While They are on the Field, When They Return Home”** by Neal Pirolo
- **MissioNexus.org** is an organization that resources and networks churches and organizations engaged in the Great Commission.
- **Alongsidecares.net**, **Barnabas.org**, and **Mti.org** offer resources for battered missionaries returning home for a time of healing, restoration, and reassessing calling.



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