

## Sending and Caring: The Role of the House Church

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*Overview: House churches have a lot to offer in terms of support for their missionaries. Missions is an extension of the ministry of the local church and by sending and caring for our missionaries we ourselves are also reaching the unreached to the ends of the earth. People are ready to be sent out, but are we as a church ready to give them the support they need? Note: The pronouns “he/him” is used throughout this article for the sake of simplicity, and it includes women as well.*

The growing involvement in missions has confronted the house church with unique challenges. Because so many house churches are sending out missionaries and are taking full responsibility for them, member care in this scenario focuses not only on the care of the missionary as a total human being, but also has a strong emphasis on equipping house churches to be effective in member care. The house churches have taken responsibility for their missionaries, but they are not always certain what it entails.

The term “member care” is relatively new, but if we look at the core meaning of it, it is nothing new. Member care simply means to care for the members of the Body of Christ. That includes members sent out by the Church to reach the unreached. According to O’Donnell (1997:144) member care in this sense is not new. It is a New Testament practice. Yet what is new is the more organized attempt to develop comprehensive, sustainable member care approaches to support cross-cultural Christian workers.

House churches have a lot to offer in terms of support for their missionaries. We want house church members to really see missions as an extension of the ministry of the house church and that by sending and caring for their missionaries they themselves are also reaching the unreached to the ends of the earth. As Herr (1987: 43) puts it: “The missionary is an extension of his<sup>1</sup> local church.”

People are ready to be sent out, but are we as a house church ready to give them the support they need? The support of the missionary does not start when the missionary goes to the field. It already starts when the missionary is evaluated and selected right at the beginning. It is an ongoing support and involvement that continues even after the missionary has returned from the field. In order to give the necessary support from within house churches, two things are needed: (a) the house church should understand the mission cycle and (b) a house church support group should be formed before the missionary goes to the field. The house church support group consists of people committed to care for the missionary and to be involved in his life and ministry.

Let us look in more detail to these two areas: the mission cycle and the house church support group.

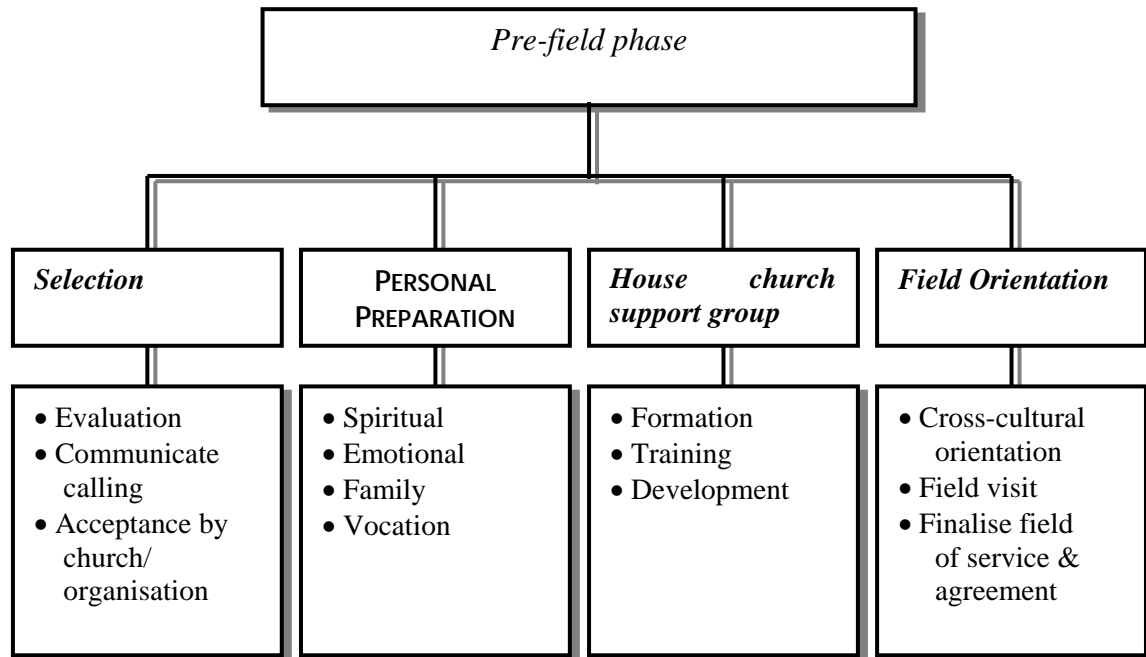
### **A. The Mission Cycle**

In order for house churches to develop a proper member care strategy, they first of all need to understand the stages and challenges of missionary life.

#### **The Pre-field Phase**

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<sup>1</sup> For practical reasons the masculine gender is used for both male and female.



The Pre-field phase includes four areas: selection, personal preparation, formation of the house church support group, and field orientation. Simply stated, during the selection process information about the missionary candidate is gathered by questionnaires, references and psychometric evaluation. The purpose of this is to get relevant information and a profile of a candidate's functional skills, personality- and behavioural characteristics.

This information can be used to:

- identify emotional problems
- identify personality disorders
- identify and address areas of personal development
- assist in career planning
- determine whether a candidate is suitable for a specific environment, culture or position.

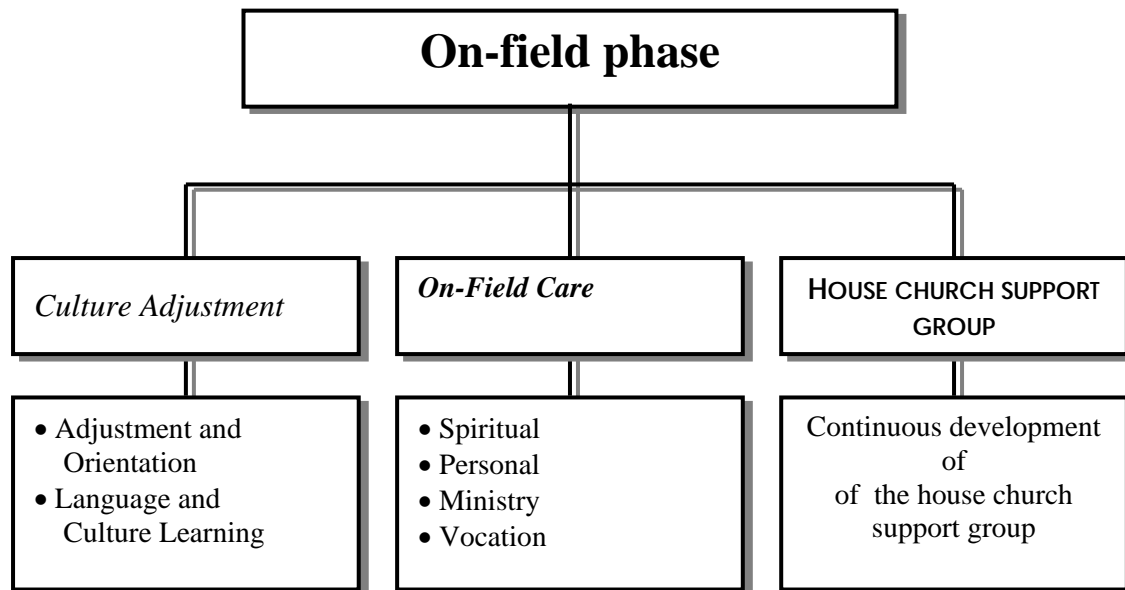
The missionary should be well prepared spiritually, emotionally, and where needed additional skills should be acquired.

Where a family is evaluated, it is essential that the wife and children should also be included in the evaluation. Thereafter they communicate their calling to the leadership of the house church. After prayer and discussion the missionary candidate (and his family) is accepted by the house church as their missionary.

During the pre-field phase a house church support group should be formed, equipped, and should start to function within the house church. A more detail discussion on the house church support group is given later in the article.

It is also important that the missionary should visit his/her field of service to get first hand information on conditions on the field as well as his role on the field.

### The On-Field Phase



During the on-field phase the missionary has to adjust to and become part of a new environment and lifestyle. It is important for the house church support group back home to understand what the missionary is experiencing (e.g. culture stress, language learning) to be able to give him the necessary support.

He must orientate himself on the field, for example how to purchase something in the new culture and what is available where. Everything is new to him. Things are done in ways that differ from his own culture and he has to learn how to function in this new and foreign culture. The missionary should start with language and culture studies as soon as he arrives on the field.

Similar to a new-born baby, all the missionary's senses are bombarded with new sensations and observations and like the new-born baby, he is psychologically and emotionally ready to become part of his new environment.

What usually happens is that the new missionary – just as the new-born baby – does not get the opportunity to bond with his host culture. Too much time is spent with people from his own culture, living on the same field and too little time with people from the host culture. He lives isolated from the host culture and goes “out” a few times a week to the local people, but always returns to the security of people from his own culture. He does not get the opportunity to effectively bond with the host culture during this early stage. This tends to lead to a situation where the missionary does not become part of his host culture and does not get the opportunity to build relationships on the same level – as friend-to-friend.

Language studies cannot be dissociated from culture and relationships. Mere knowledge of the language without building relationships, is not of much value to the missionary. That is why it is important that the new missionary should initially live, worship and buy things together with the local people. The new missionary must portray an attitude of willingness to learn from the people in the host culture.

It is advisable for the missionary to study the language and culture full time. The time to do this will vary depending on the language that must be learnt and whether he attends a formal language school. A general guideline is spending at least the first year on the field in full time language and culture studies. It is a process and takes time. If the missionary does not have the opportunity to start learning the language within the first year, chances are bleak that he will learn it at all. He learns to build alternative ways to communicate, for example by using interpreters. Then he does not have to learn the language in order to survive. This is why the initial time together with his host culture is so very important.

In many cases missionaries work in situations on the field where they get little spiritual input in their own lives. Most of the time they give out spiritually more than they receive. Therefore it is necessary to emphasise the maintenance of their own spiritual life. To assist them in this area, spiritual care on the field must focus on the following areas: spiritual warfare, pastoral care, equipment on how to maintain their own spiritual life and ways in which fellow missionaries could care for each other.

Personal care includes aspects such as physical and emotional care and the continuous development of missionaries. Just as any person has a need for continuous development as a person, so the missionary has a need to develop continuously and such opportunities must be created. Regular debriefing opportunities are also an important part of continuous development.

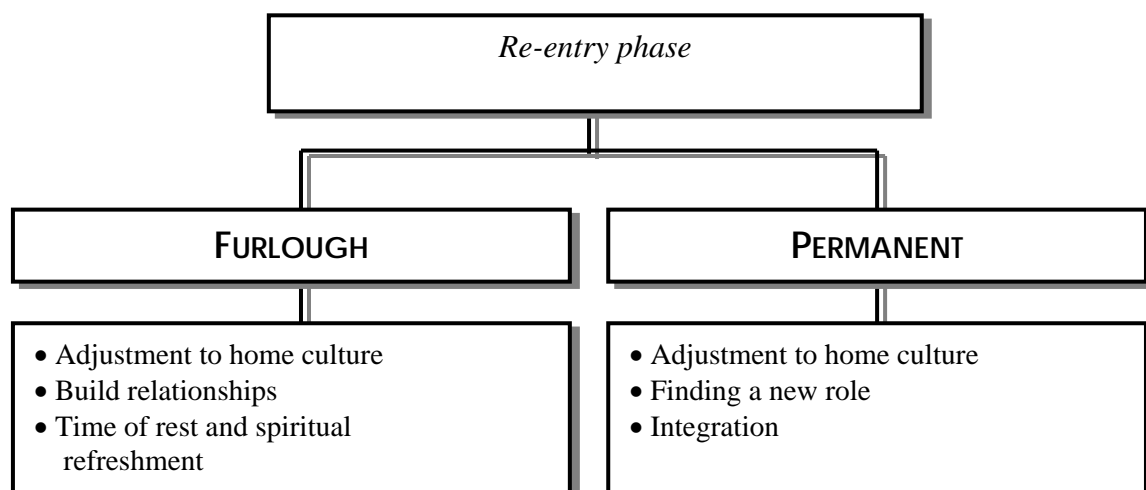
As the missionary’s ministry is established and starts to grow, he will have specific ministry needs. He might need Bibles or other resources such as literature or film projectors. Or he might feel he himself needs to be better equipped in a certain area of his ministry. After a long time on the field, the missionary’s ministry might change as his work develops or circumstances change. In such a case the missionary’s ministry needs will change as well.

Vocational care is specifically applicable to tentmakers. The interest group of the tentmaker can assist with practical support such as material and resources that are needed. The interest group can also visit the tentmaker on the field and give assistance where needed.

During this phase the house church support group must continuously develop and expand their member care strategy to meet the needs of the missionary. Where the house church support group itself cannot give the necessary support, alternatives should be found. For example, where someone from the house church support group cannot visit the field or does not have the expertise to give the necessary member care support on the field, other organisations that are already operating on the field might be asked to help the missionary on their behalf. Regular communication via email and phone calls with the missionary is also essential.

One of the best ways to do on-field care is through regular visits by members of the house church. If missionaries know that their supporters actually know what living conditions in which they minister, and have met some of those with whom they are ministering, it will just be so much easier for mutual trust to develop. When we send missionaries out, we should not only care for them before they go, but also when they are on the field as well as when they return from the field.

**The Re-entry Phase**



Re-entry can be permanent or just for a short time (furlough). In both cases the missionary needs proper care and it is the house church’s responsibility to care for these returning missionaries. Astronauts tell us that the most dangerous part of space travel is not getting into orbit, but getting back into earth’s atmosphere. In the same way re-entry – returning to your home culture you left when you

started with missionary work – can also be the most difficult part of any cross-cultural experience. It should never be ignored or minimised. This is true of both the missionary who returns for a furlough of a limited period, as well as the missionary who returns permanently, be it for practical reasons, prematurely or to retire. It is nearly always accompanied by reverse culture shock, and if this is not managed with wisdom and care, you may be left with a wounded spiritual worker who might take years before reaching his optimum spiritual health again. You might even have a person on your hands who is so hurt and disillusioned that he may never recover! Sending a person out carries an awesome responsibility with it!

Re-entry is normally a very difficult and stressful time for the missionary as he tries to come to terms with the fact that he is back home now and in some cases may never go back to the field. What the missionary experiences is very much like a process of grieving.

“To come home” is difficult for many people – as a matter of fact it might not be at all like “coming home”. In many cases the missionary realises that “home” is no longer “home” and the host culture feels much more like “home” (cf. Fawcett, 1999: 41). Many times the missionary feels like a stranger in his own culture.

The sending to and returning of missionaries from the field, is nothing new. An example may be found in Scripture:

Missionaries were sent out: Acts 13:2-3

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Missionaries returned: Acts 14:26-28; 15:35

From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

According to Pirolo (2000:23) five issues of re-entry are modelled for us in these verses:

- They finished their assignment.
- They returned to their sending church.
- They received the church’s hospitality.
- They rehearsed all that God had done in and through them.
- They ministered again in their church.

Although the missionary’s visit might just be for a short time, he still has to adjust to his home culture. The missionary as a person and his way of doing things change as he is working and living on the field. Furlough gives the missionary the opportunity to visit his supporters and strengthen relationships. His whole furlough must, however, not just consist of feedback opportunities. The missionary must also have a time of rest.

In many cases when the missionary returns permanently, he returns to his/her sending church. Because re-entry is usually a difficult and stressful time for the missionary, it is extremely important that the house church will be able to help the missionary. So many times neither the missionary nor his house church is properly prepared for this phase. Often the missionary is not seen as the house church’s responsibility after his/her return. In other cases the churches are willing to assist their missionaries, but simply do not know how to care for them during re-entry.

The reasons why missionaries return from the field are often seen negatively. According to Taylor (1997:7) it is necessary that we reduce using negative terms related to the subject and start seeing the positive in attrition. He describes it as follows: “Returning missionaries are quickly labelled as dropouts, failures or quitters. Often this is an unfair judgement on the wrong people. A missionary

might have returned because negative field leaders who felt threatened because of this young, gifted person have pushed him out. Or they return because of burnout, or because they did not receive pastoral care, or because they did not have a realistic expectation of themselves, their house church or the sending organisation.”

The reasons why missionaries return from the field are not always negative and therefore premature return from the field should be seen as a failure. “Sometimes it is for the best if the missionary leaves the field - sometimes even the will of God. It can happen that God allows a person to work in a cross-cultural situation in order to develop his character and skills. Thereafter He will send him to a new ministry and sometimes that will be within his own country. Sometimes it is necessary for missionaries to leave the field so that the indigenous church will have an opportunity to develop.” (cf. Taylor, 1997: 7)

At the end of the first mission trip, we read that Paul and Barnabas returned to their home church, Antioch, “where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.” (Acts 14: 26) At that time they had completed the work God had sent them to do in the churches they had planted, and it was God’s will that they should return to their home church where they “stayed a long time with the disciples.” (Acts 14: 28)

For more detail on re-entry support, see Re-entry Support in Section B.

**B. The House Church Support Group**

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

*Rom 10:13b-15*

It is God’s will that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Yet we see from Rom 10:13b-15 that there is a progressive development to get there. It is like building blocks, one on top of the other:

|                           |
|---------------------------|
| They are saved            |
| They call on the Lord     |
| They believe in the Lord  |
| They hear the good news   |
| The good news is preached |
| Messengers are being sent |

The bottom block, on which all the other blocks rest, is “people are being sent.” The whole process therefore starts with someone being sent! The Greek word for “someone being sent” is “apostolos,” which means “missionary.”

The biggest need in terms of missions today is not to get enough missionaries. There are people who are ready to go – and many more are preparing to go. The problem is to get enough *senders*! We need senders to support those going out to proclaim the Good News close by as well as far off. This support is not only in terms of money, but includes every aspect of support.

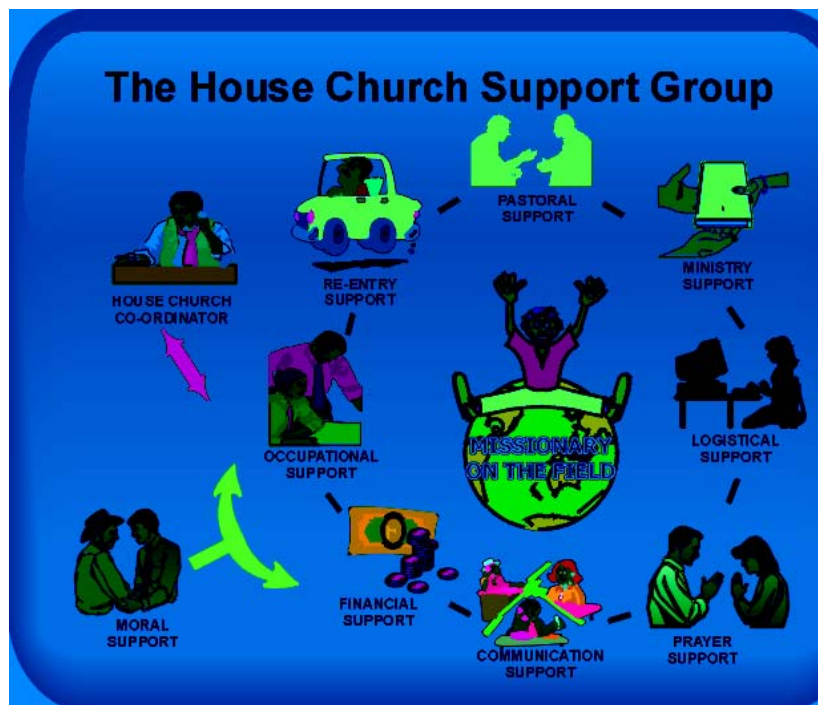
The house church holds the key to this support. In the New Testament we read that the house church was the basis for missions (e.g. in Acts 13:2-3), and that missionaries like Paul and Barnabas reported back to their sending church on their return (Acts 14:27-28). But more than that – there are enough resources available in the house church to supply most of the needs of a missionary!

Missionaries live under immense pressure. They are often living in less than ideal conditions, with less than ideal support. Because they are often in the front-line of the onslaught against the kingdom of darkness, they are also under immense spiritual attack. Unless their sending house churches take full responsibility for them, they will not be able to remain standing on the long run.

By taking care of our missionaries' needs, and by supporting them on all other levels of care that they need, we are setting them free to be so much more effective in the ministry to which God has called them. After all, it is not *their* ministry they are involved in. It is *our* ministry. They might be the "infantrymen" of God's Kingdom, but those supporting them are just as much part of God's Army. We are all *equal partners* in God's Kingdom.

One way of ensuring that missionaries are well cared for is to support the missionary from within the house church, with one person responsible for each aspect or "portfolio" of member care. The house church co-ordinator holds the whole effort together. He is someone who represents the missionary family in the house church network. In this way an effective house church support group will enable the missionary, as an extension of his house church, to fulfil the ministry of his church.

The house church support group can be illustrated graphically as follows:



One of the biggest challenges that we are facing, is to get house church members to commit themselves and become involved. A few ways to involve them are as follows:

1. Perform a drama in house church, to visualise the house church's mission involvement or the missionary's circumstances and ministry.
2. Do a quiz about the country, culture and people group where the missionary works. This could, for example, be a good way to involve the youth.
3. Small groups can adopt a missionary (single or a family).

**Portfolios within the house church support group**

As mentioned above, each member of the house church support group is responsible for a specific aspect or aspects of the support of the missionary. Let's take a closer look at the different portfolios that we have within the house church support group. There can be more or less portfolios, depending on the needs of the specific missionary. At the end of the discussion of every "portfolio" we have included a list of ideas – just to get you going. It is by no means exhaustive and with a bit of creative thinking you may come up with a lot more good ideas.

### **Moral Support**

Moral support is the very foundation of the total support system. So much so that it is not only treated as a separate “portfolio.” It is part of every portfolio.

The term has to do with the morale of missionaries. “Morale” is a military term, which means “courage and endurance in supporting fatigue and danger, especially of troops in war.” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982: 747) Moral support in missions means to act in such a way towards those who are in the thick of spiritual battle, that they are encouraged because of our actions. We have a good example of moral support in 2 Corinthians 7: 4-7 and 13 where Paul writes to the church in Corinth:

*I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.*

*For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn — conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.*

*By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.*

Paul was discouraged, he was tired, he experienced fear within, and conflicts on the outside. But because the church at Corinth encouraged Titus, who, in turn encouraged Paul, Paul was lifted in his spirit. Moral support is about encouragement. That is why everyone in the house church can be involved in this part of support, because everyone can encourage a missionary in word and deed. It can be as simple as saying to them, “God bless you! We are excited with you in your missionary venture!” It is love in action. This is why Paul said to Philemon (1:7): “Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.” Not only was Paul encouraged by Philemon’s love, but also so were “the saints,” in other words, the other believers.

But moral support does not only come from individuals in the house church. The house church as a whole can do a lot to either encourage or discourage a missionary. It can be an attitude that your missionary will sense, or something you do. A simple act of sending a missionary out by the laying on of hands, can be very encouraging.

On the other hand there are many thoughtless ways of discouraging your missionary. One may be an attitude of “Why over there, why not here?”

One aspect of moral support that is often overlooked in the house church is *the identification of those gifted as missionaries and who are equipped as missionaries by the Holy Spirit*. In any healthy body of Christ there will be those gifted as missionaries, but often they have not been given the opportunity to discover this gift or to exercise their gift as a missionary. It is the responsibility of the house church leadership to take the initiative in identifying those with a missionary gift.

And please note that a person gifted as a missionary doesn’t only minister on a foreign “field”! He sometimes has to minister in his “sending church,” so that he can plough back into the house church some of the insights he gained from his cross-cultural ministry (e.g. Paul in Acts 14:27-28).

### **Practical guidelines for moral support**

1. Encourage your missionary through personal talks or communication. A few words like: “May the Lord bless you” or “We share your excitement and pray for you” can be a great encouragement.
2. Give personal prayer requests through to your missionary. Remember your missionary wants to pray for you also.
3. Let your missionary feel part of the house church. Share regularly with him what is happening in the house church.
4. Visit your missionary on the field and give feedback to the house church.
5. Subscribe your missionary to some magazines. News magazines like Time Magazine will keep him up to date on world affairs. Also something like Reader’s Digest. You can personalise it by asking different people to sponsor it.



### **1. Pastoral Support**

Maybe the most important part of moral support is to give your missionary the necessary pastoral care that he needs to grow spiritually. The purpose of pastoral support is to ensure that the missionary (and his family, if married) develops and grows spiritually. This means that we should ensure that the missionary gets the necessary fellowship with other believers, and that he has enough time and opportunities to study the Word and to develop spiritually. One of the factors that plays a role in the premature return of missionaries is that they do not keep regular quiet times.

Any person with the gift of shepherding can fill this portfolio of *Pastoral care*. He or she does not need a degree in theology, but must have a heart for people. Barnabas was such a person. Maybe that is why he and Paul were initially sent out as a team.

Just remember that your missionary as a person – together with his family – must be cared for. Do not forget the spiritual needs of missionary kids!

#### **Practical guidelines for pastoral support**

1. Share with the missionary what the Lord is doing in your life. For example: “This is what the Lord has been saying to me in my quiet time the past few weeks” or “This has really touched me during the sermon/bible study/cell group”.
2. Missionaries are always giving out, and desperately need to be “topped up” spiritually on a regular basis. Give them information about good articles, books or websites that can use to build them up spiritually.
3. Encourage a few people with e-mail facilities to set up a Bible study group via e-mail with your missionary (if he is not working in a sensitive area).
4. If there are other missionaries working in the same area, encourage your missionary to fellowship with them. Write to these missionaries as well, and build relationships of trust with them, so that you can hear from them as well how your missionary is doing. This is not to “spy” on your missionary, but to get first hand feedback from the field. You don’t even have to ask them formally for information. If you have built positive relationships with them, they will communicate with you if necessary.

### **2. Ministry Support**

The purpose of missions is to lead people to Christ, to disciple them and teach them to obey everything He has commanded us. But discipling people cross-culturally is a tall order indeed. It is necessary that the missionary will help the new believers in a sensible way to apply the Word in their own culture and not just to duplicate Western or Eastern Christianity.

That is why it is necessary for you to give your missionary the necessary *ministry support*, so that he can reach his ministry goals. Get as much information as possible about your missionary’s ministry. How can you support him? Does he have applicable discipleship material? Are there other people on the field or in similar ministries that can support him? If your missionary is working together with another mission organisation, it is important that there will be close co-operation in this area between the missionary, the house church and the mission organisation.

#### **Practical guidelines for ministry support**

Ensure that he gets the necessary training and exposure to equip him for future ministry during home visits.

### **3. Logistical Support**

‘Logistics’ is again a military term. It means “the branch of strategy concerned with the moving and quartering of troops” (Hayward & Sparkes, 1982: 689).

The essence of logistical support in this sense is to care for each other within the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:24b-25 we are told: “*But God has combined the members of the body... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.*”

There are a host of practical things that can be done by the house church support group. Fact is, it makes a radical difference for a missionary if he knows that he has a house church support group he can trust to take care of all those practical little things that can make life so difficult. Here are a few practical things once more. But you will see they are only examples that can be expanded *ad infinitum*:

### **Practical guidelines for logistical support**

#### *1. Ministry needs*

- 1.1 Ask which ministry resources he needs such as Bibles, literature, film projectors, etc.
- 1.2 Assist with the purchasing and transporting of resources to the field. (In some cases it is better to buy Bibles on the field. In that case send some funds to your missionary to make the purchase).

#### *2. Family needs*

- 2.1 If your missionary family is home-schooling their children, you may be asked to be a contact person with a school or education department to obtain curriculum materials/teaching aids.
- 2.2 If they have children who are in boarding school or at university, a family or couple might provide a home for them.
- 2.3 Someone might be the ideal person to visit or care for the missionary's elderly parents.
- 2.4 You might even be asked to be their children's adoptive parents should death occur.
- 2.5 It might also be something as simple as forwarding children's videos or books on a regular basis.
- 2.6 Find out which type of music (apart from gospel) your missionary likes and send him some CD's or cassettes.
- 2.7 Find out which type of magazines (apart from spiritual) your missionary likes and send him some of his favourites.

#### *3. Medical needs*

- 3.1 Identify someone who will help your missionary to put a good medical kit together and at the same time be his medical advisor. This could be a GP.
- 3.2 Encourage the missionary to contribute to a medical fund. Many times missionaries struggle when there is an medical emergency or people must be hospitalised that involves a lot of expenses.

#### *4. Material Needs*

4. 1. This can include matters such as getting your missionary and his belongings to the area where he will be ministering and back again.
- 4.2. This could include storing your missionary's personal belongings, which he chooses not to sell or take with him.
4. 3. It might also mean sending necessary supplies to him.

### **4. Prayer Support**

It was Tennyson who said: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of" (Parrinder, 1990: 99) and Augustine: "Without God, we cannot; but without us, God will not."

Sometimes God just cannot allow us to succeed without prayer – because it will give us the impression that we can achieve things through our own efforts – and make us proud. In His sovereignty God chose to make us co-workers in His Kingdom. He chose to give us the opportunity to be involved in His work through prayer, and so share in the blessing!

"Prayer is not begging God to do something He is loath to do. It is not overcoming God's reluctance to act. It is rather, enforcing Christ's victory over Satan. It is the effective, fervent communication with the Creator of the universe – in line with His will – which controls the balance of power in world affairs" (Pirolo, 1991: 96).

In his discourse on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6, Paul clearly spells out the armour for our defence. But for attack he identifies two major weapons: “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” and *prayer* (cf. Pirolo, 1991:96):

*“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (v. 18)*

Someone needs to get prayer requests from the missionaries and communicate it to the house church. If the information is kept interesting and fresh, with up-to-date news, interesting photographs and stories, people *will* pray faithfully. That is why we need a creative person here. If your missionary is working in a sensitive area, please be careful when sharing information, both with the missionary and the house church.

#### **Practical guidelines for prayer support**

1. Pray specifically for each missionary family — not only for the family as a whole, but also for every individual family member.
2. Select a “missionary of the month” or “missionary of the week” and pray for him in all the house group meetings.
3. Mention specific requests for prayer (e.g. for health problems, challenges in ministry, etc.) to the house church.
4. Encourage individuals and families to pray at home for your missionaries and their families.
5. Identify with your missionary. When you are lonely, pray for your missionary to cope with loneliness; when you are hurt, pray for your missionary to cope with feelings of hurt; and when you are encouraged, rejoice with the successes of your missionary.
6. *Brighten up prayer meetings for missionaries with interesting information, maps, photographs, stories, and games — just be creative!*

#### **5. Communication Support**

It is not good enough just to pray for missionaries. It is also necessary to tell them that you are praying for them – even what you are praying for them. This may be an encouragement to them as well. And what is more – they can read it many times – and be blessed by the same letter many times.

Communication is a two-way channel. It is not fair to put all the responsibility for communication on the missionary alone. You must try from your side to find out as much as possible about your missionary and the circumstances under which he is working. This means you have to do what it takes to get a real, good, first hand report of what is happening where your missionary is ministering. And what better way than going there yourself or sending someone from your house church! On the other hand, it is necessary that the missionary will communicate with the house church support group on a regular basis. A two-way communication channel is then formed that should be maintained.

There is also a host of other ways to communicate to your missionary. This could be an audiocassette (on which individuals greet and encourage the missionary), photographs, e-mail (which is a must nowadays, if it is possible on the field) or a “care” parcel.

It is also important that the house church support group should be well informed about the country and people where the missionary works. Information about the culture, people group and less reached groups in the country or region should be obtained and shared with the house church support group.

A very important part of communication is a regular newsletter from the missionary. that the newsletters are distributed, keep the mailing list up to date, ensure that the communication channels are kept open.

#### **Practical guidelines for communication support**

1. Communicate regularly with your missionary. Tell him that you pray for him.
2. Distribute your missionary’s newsletter.
3. Keep your missionary’s address list up to date.

4. Visit your missionary on the field. Send those responsible for missions in the house church, including the house church co-ordinator, on a field trip regularly to encourage your missionary and so that both parties can get first hand information.
5. Take photo's of interesting events at home and send it to your missionary. Let your missionary take photo's about his life and ministry and send it to you.
6. Remember the birthdays of your missionary and the children and their wedding anniversary.
7. You can supply stationery to house church members (e.g. aerogrammes) and encourage them to write letters to your missionary.
8. Ask someone in the house church to sponsor an amount of money specifically for telephone calls, so that the missionary will be able to phone friends and family while he is on the field.
9. Make sure your missionary has the latest copy of your house church's address and telephone list.
10. Make available a "Missionary Directory" to members of the house church with relevant information of your missionaries – like dates of birth, anniversaries, interests, regular prayer items, etc.
11. Encourage businessmen to visit your missionary while on overseas visits.

## **6. Financial Support**

Financial support is probably the most talked about of the areas of support. In fact, when you talk about missionary support, most people think of nothing else but "paying and praying".

There are few things that discourage a missionary as much as struggling to survive financially. We should care for them to such an extent that worries about financial matters are not part of their struggle, but of their victory.

Very few missionaries are willing to tell you directly that they are struggling financially. So it is the responsibility of the sending church to make a comparative study so they can calculate the cost of living in the country in which their missionary is ministering and how much he really needs to survive – and some more.

An important aspect of financial support is fund raising. That can include "101 ways to raise money for missions". That is, however, not what will be discussed here. The fact is, if we are serious about tithing, these things will not really be necessary. Not that it is wrong! What is really needed is that Christians, who are serious about world evangelisation, should have simpler life-styles to make more funds available for the Kingdom. It does not mean living like a beggar. But sometimes it means that you buy the least expensive item that can accomplish the job – so that some missionary does not have to live like a beggar. In other words, avoid status symbols!

There is much more to financial support than just raising finances for missions. Managing those funds, making arrangements with banks, foreign exchange controls, even paying taxes in his own country and the host country, and matters such as acting as an agent that lets a house for a missionary, fall into this area.

Financial support includes mutual accountability from the house church and your missionary.

### **Practical guidelines for financial support**

1. Encourage people to contribute sacrificially to a specific missionary's ministry – above and beyond their normal tithing. Although the missionary will most probably support himself by means of his job, this income might not be enough and there might be extra expenses for himself personally as well as for his ministry.
2. Ask the missionary on a regular basis how he is doing financially.
3. Annually, together with the missionary, prepare a budget for his personal as well as ministry expenses. That will give the house church members as well as the missionary a good idea of what his living costs will be. The following expenses must be taken into account. It will differ depending on the missionary's circumstances:

Monthly expenses

- Transport
- Accommodation
- Water & electricity
- Telephone, fax, and email
- Personal (food, clothes etc.)
- Pension/insurance
- Medical scheme

Annual Expenses

- Travelling costs for furlough

Additional furlough expenses, not included in the monthly expenses

- Furlough arrangements and expenses
- Tax obligations
- Service and maintenance of vehicles

4. Make sure that your missionary contributes to a medical and pension fund.

### 7. Occupational Support

More and more emphasis is being put on tentmaker mission work. That is when a missionary ministers to people through his “secular” occupation – and is then a witness where and when the Lord gives an opportunity. This model of mission work is especially strategic in countries where conventional missionaries are not allowed.

Almost any occupation can be of use in this strategy: teacher, engineer, doctor, farmer, businessman, or a nurse. A missionary in this ministry might need a group of people in the same occupation that will be able to assist him occupationally. Say, for instance, he is an engineer; he might need very specific technical information at some point. A group of engineers at home can help him to find that information or just support him generally. A teacher on the field might need information on a curriculum or might need teaching material. A group of teachers here in China can be of great help. Such an occupational support group may be called an *interest group*.

#### Practical guidelines for occupational support

1. Experts in China can form an interest group to advise the missionary concerning, e.g., an agricultural or education project. (Experts will not all necessarily be in the same house church.)
2. A person in the same occupation as the missionary can act as liaison person between the missionary and his interest group.
3. Experts can go on a short-term basis to help on the field e.g. with a building project.

### 8. Re-entry Support

Re-entry is described in more detail under The Life Cycle in Section A.

Often re-entry is not seen as part of the missionary’s ministry and the missionary himself is not seen as part of the responsibility of the supporters or his house church while he is going through re-entry. In some cases the supporters might still be involved during the re-entry phase, but they are not prepared or equipped to give the necessary care and to accompany the missionary during his re-entry. Many times the missionary himself is not prepared for the demands that re-entry will have on him.

Re-entry is much more than just returning to the old and familiar. The missionary is confronted with changes that have taken place on different levels in his life: The missionary as a person has changed, his family and friends have changed and the country has changed. These changes and the accompanying adjustment may result in high levels of stress. During this time the missionary needs very specific care and detailed guidance.

It is of great importance that the missionary as well as his supporters is informed about the normal re-entry reactions missionaries may go through during re-entry. The missionary is not abnormal if he experiences the following: isolation, guilt, spiritual re-evaluation and medical problems. Some

missionaries want to return to the field immediately. It is necessary to ask, with great wisdom, if it is the Lord's will at that specific time or if the person should first have a time of rest and re-adjustment. There is no time limit to the re-entry process. It can take from 6 months to 2 years – even longer. The most important is, however, that the missionary will make progress on his way to integration, the ultimate aim of re-entry. Integration has taken place when the missionary has established himself as a changed person in a new role within his ministry, house church and society. When the missionary returns at retirement, integration would be the point where he is able to keep himself busy in a meaningful way and at the same time realises that he still has a role to play in the house church and society. The missionary has gained valuable field experience that should not be overlooked or ignored, but should be used effectively within his house church.

### **Practical guidelines for re-entry support**

Re-entry Support can be divided into three phases: Preparation, Arrival of the missionary, and Follow-up.

- **Preparation**

#### *1.1 Preparation for the missionary*

- a. Where possible, the re-entry process should be discussed with the missionary in personal conversations at least 3 to 4 months before he returns, so that he can prepare himself. *The person who discusses it with the missionary must have gone through re-entry himself.* If personal conversations are not possible, make sure that the missionary has access to materials that describes the re-entry process.
- b. Give information to the missionary about school options for their children, prices of goods in China and where needed, information about job opportunities.

#### *1.2 Preparation for the house church support group*

- a. Invite a missionary who has already gone through re-entry to talk to the house church support group about re-entry, 3 months before the missionary returns. Do follow up sessions where material about re-entry is discussed.
- b. Prepare an action plan to provide in the immediate needs of the missionary when he returns. Include aspects such as: Holiday accommodation, transport, accommodation, finances and school education for the children.

- **Arrival of the Missionary**

- a. *Let your missionary feel special.* Welcome him at the airport and/or house.
- b. Ensure that the missionary first has a time of rest. Make arrangements for his immediate practical needs such as transport, basic groceries and toiletries needed for the first few days and also an amount in cash available if he cannot immediately change currency.
- c. Ensure that the house church knows beforehand that he will first have a time of rest and will not be available for meetings. Make one person responsible to contact him regularly to determine whether he and his family have other needs.

- **Follow up**

The follow up phase starts when the missionary returns from his time of rest and includes 5 areas:

- a. Practical help –transport, financial arrangements, medical consultations.
- b. Debriefing – The missionary must have opportunities where he can talk about his field experience in a relaxed situation without any pressure on him. *Please take note that these are not feedback sessions.*
- c. Quality time with the house group – Create opportunities, both formal and informal, where the missionary can share his experiences.
- d. Special care – Be aware of problem areas that need professional care such as emotional problems, marriage problems and children having real problems with adjustment.
- e. Long term follow up – Be patient. Re-entry is a process and does not happen in one day. Do not forget the missionary after a few months. Visit him regularly and give help where needed.

### House Church Co-ordinator

In the end the buck needs to stop somewhere. Someone needs to take final responsibility to make sure everyone understands his or her function in the house church support group. But it should be done with a light touch. The person responsible should also look after the interests of the missionary and represent him at every level of house church life and in meetings. This house church co-ordinator forms a vital link between the missionary and the house church.

### To Put it all Together

Can you imagine what would happen if every missionary sent out had such a supportive house church that functions well? We would be so much more effective and much better stewards of the resources at our disposal. What is more, many ordinary house church members who cannot go to Africa or the Middle East will feel that they can use their vocations and gifts to further the Kingdom of God “to the ends of the earth”. They will become enthusiastic about missions like never before.

In the end it is about body life – under the Lordship of Christ. And is that not what the body of Christ is all about? The greatest need for many missionaries returning home is for genuine fellowship and understanding. They need fellow believers who are real and with whom they can be real. What is better than a supportive house church that functions like a support fellowship – as part of the body of Christ? Let us work together to make this a reality in house church!

Each portfolio can be filled either by an individual or two or three people. On the other hand it is also possible for one person to take up the responsibility of more than one portfolio. The important thing, however, is that they must be able to work together as a team. It is therefore very important that much time is spent together, just building relationships. “Socials” like having a meal together can be very handy to achieve this. If possible, build good relationships before the missionary leaves for the field.

How to start a house church support group in your house church: Since most of the missionaries are from village house churches, everyone is naturally involved in the process. Much of the items/lists in this article will likely be co-ordinated at a higher level in the house church network and not at the village level. The challenge today for house churches is not just to send more missionaries, but to ensure that these missionaries are effectively cared for from the pre-field phase through to re-entry.

### Items for Discussion

1. List the main challenges that your house church faces in sending and caring for your missionaries.
2. List some practical ways that members of your house church can be help in missionary support.
3. What resources are available to care for your field missionaries? How can this be improved?
4. How does your house church care for returning missionaries? How can this be improved?
5. What resources could your house church offer to enhance member care for your region/country?

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