



## Missionary Care and the Local Church

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Stewarding churches will help themselves and their missionaries when they adopt a proactive approach to missionary care. This includes having a written missionary care policy set in place that accepts the overall responsibility for helping missionaries and their families and teams deal with the rigors of cross-cultural ministry. The church can do this by educating their missionaries about the challenges of the work on the field and specific risks involved, as well as offering strategies for dealing with both normative and non-normative stresses inherent in mission life.

MRN's founder, Bob Waldron has suggested a model for the lifecycle of missionaries that begins with selection and training, continues through years of active service on the field, and concludes with reentry into the home culture. The experiences and needs of missionaries differ a great deal depending on where they are in this cycle, but each stage offers opportunities for care.

Good preventative care starts with stewarding churches systematically, screening and assessing the suitability of cross-cultural workers as part of the process of employment. This means that the sponsoring congregation has the responsibility to understand the minimum physical, spiritual, relational, and emotional health requirements for mission assignments. Prospective cross cultural workers are screened with respect to the factors possibly affecting the likelihood of adverse response to the risks and stresses of mission work. Assessment in each of the areas—physical, spiritual, relational, emotional—should be carried out by responsible, appropriately prepared individuals with expertise in each area. Missionaries seeking sponsorship are to be held responsible for revealing information that may be relevant to assessing the risks involved in an assignment.

Preventative missionary care also means that the church will send spiritually mature, emotionally stable, prepared, and well-trained missionaries to the field. They will maintain an interest in the missionaries on the field and monitor their work. Stewarding churches also need to be aware of the dynamics of teams of which their missionaries may be a part. In some cases, it may be in everybody's best interest that a missionary leave the field.

In the *Mission Frontiers* journal, W.D. Taylor suggests, "some missionaries who stay should leave. Their presence sometimes can compound the tragedy, in that their staying makes some of the better people leave. This requires courageous, proactive leadership from the responsible church." Stewarding churches need to be cognizant of their missionary family's living conditions in order to provide appropriate, on-going care. They need to seek ways to nurture their missionaries spiritually and to ensure their families are well taken care of.

It is often some sort of crisis, problem, or failure that causes churches to think more seriously about the need for missionary care. Opportunities for crisis are magnified for individuals and families working far from their home base and most churches with experience in supporting missionaries have seen their share of crises. So that stewarding churches are not caught unawares at the advent of a crisis, a written missionary care policy should be set in place that includes strategies to support their missionaries during traumatic events and other unusual and unexpected sources of severe stress.

The church will also provide both practical and emotional support of missionaries during home assignments (also known as furloughs) and upon final reentry. This includes understanding the missionaries' pain of saying goodbye to people they have worked with closely, the concrete tasks of relocation, and the practical, interpersonal and cultural difficulties in readjusting to life "back home."

Stewarding churches will see that returned missionaries are not forgotten as they reenter their home culture. They will help them receive the spiritual and emotional care they need if they have been adversely affected by exposure to stress and trauma through their work, a process that can take months or even years.

In short, sending missionaries implies a responsibility to support them, not only financially, but spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. Written missionary care policies can help both missionaries and the churches that send them be successful in this goal.