

# Missionary Care

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I would say I was very well cared for in general by our supporters and overseers, most notably Brentwood Oaks in Austin, Hendersonville, Tenn. and Fredericksburg, Texas churches. They have always seen that we had enough and we have not ever had to ask more than what was offered. It always seems to be enough. What we did not know about, or realize, was a need, our supporters or now the ITCM Board took the initiative to provide it. We went without some things on purpose to fit in better here and never missed them.

I think churches are doing a better job of missionary care these days. I can mention a few observations that I seem to hear from many and which I can 'amen' myself.

### 1. Financial management/accounting.

Find ways to help. Maybe pay for some basic accounting courses for missionaries before they get on the field. Any missionary worth his weight in cabbage manages lots of funds (not mission church treasury) but other funds because he is involved in many projects and much benevolence. Most missionaries, this one included, got no training in that before we arrived on the field. It is a constant headache. Obviously the church should provide for a power of attorney to help with needs such as filing tax returns and other issues stateside. Some efficient system should be put in place to get funds to the field in a reasonable amount of time. I am still sent checks, signed at church assemblies and mailed the day after, to another city for deposit. In 2006 there has got to be a better way. I have never had to wait a year for funds and make and sell chocolates to make ends meet like Dan Hardin said happened to him in the 50s. However I have had to wait an unexpectedly long time occasionally for funds (bank issues either here or in states usually) and I have had at times to get creative to keep an organization running. Accounting needs to be done but not entirely by a clueless missionary. The supporting church can help. Often, still, churches forget a month or send the wrong amounts. Both have happened to me, this year, in the e-mail age! When that happens we end up having to straighten out the mess that our supporters created instead of our supporters helping us.

### 2. Communication

- a. **Answer our reports.** Reports are expected. We spend time writing them. And if visits back home are any indication at least some people are reading some reports some of the time. But a reply, i.e. "good report" "keep at it" "hang in there" "we're thinking about you" or at least "the Lord be with you" etc. etc. would be nice. So often we hear nothing in response to e-mails, total silence from the states. But if we are silent even for a day, i.e. not answering e-mails or requests, people get uppity with us. We can not get uppity with supporters, because in the eyes of some, we can not "bite the hands that feed us." I don't agree with this and perhaps too often write it like I see it at the moment which is not always wise. Several at my supporting churches are good at personal, one-two line encouragement notes. Personally speaking I do not really appreciate a flood of cards that were obviously in response to a "Lets write the missionary" day in a Bible class but prefer the less frequent personal letter. In our technological age there is simply no excuse to send people across the world and then never write them by e-mail. Also, read between the lines of our reports as we often do not have the space or desire to tell it like it really is, for various reasons.
- b. **An occasional call.** I think in the 9 years I've been here perhaps 3 times I have been called, for no specific reason, to find out how we are doing and how someone can pray for us. Several times, during crisis or problem situations, I have been called, advised, etc. and that is good. But I will never forget the days and times when those folk called just to say hi and that they were thinking about us. I am not much of a homebody but if I was that would mean the world to me.



### 3. Language Learning

Put the money behind the "you must learn the language" rhetoric. Churches impress on young and prospective missionaries that they must learn the language and it is important but rarely do they pull out the checkbook to pay for it. Learning a language is expensive and should be done primarily in an intensive program in the States before departing for the field. My supporting church paid for me to go through one of those programs and it was absolutely indispensable, providing much more control of the language learning environment, than what was available on the field. Once I arrived in Russia, there were always Russians around me wanting to practice their English, which is a serious distraction that breeds laziness, since it is easier to speak English than discipline yourself to speak Russian.

### 4. Relations with Supporting/Overseeing church.

- a. **Give us a supportive, very communicative and organized representative on the mission comm.** or elders at the supporting church. The last two I had were excellent. The first was not. A huge difference that meant a lot as far as getting things done on one hand and in feeling supported on the other.
- b. **A work agreement, or contract, evaluated annually.** Sign a covenant with your missionaries. I am wary of any organization that will not put its commitment in writing. It provides a guide for expectations and a way to review performance. It prevents misunderstandings, rewards good work and provides opportunities for correction. Again, our supporters did this with me (it was their initiative) and I was grateful for it. The agreement should include stipulations for family time and days off. By the way, Sunday is not a "day off" for those in ministry in a church. It is a working day and should not count as a day off.
- c. Spend time at least a month, or longer preferably, at the supporting church, **getting to know the missionary before you send him or her out.** BOCC knew me before sending and made an effort to get to know my Russian wife. I have heard of other churches who did not know those they sent getting to know them for up to six months before they sent them out. Central church in Huntsville did this with the folks they sent to Tomsk. Excellent idea.

### 5. Furloughs.

Furloughs are expected and needed, and we are happy to oblige. It is best not to stay away longer than 2 years each time. Depending on family or other situations, perhaps even less. I would not recommend longer than 2 years in any location without one month back in the states.

- a. **Do not work your missionaries to death when they come back on furlough.** They have enough to do without a lot of extra preaching, teaching, visiting duties laid on them by the local church. I am exhausted when I read of some missionaries furlough schedules. Neither BOCC nor the ITCM board has loaded me with anything extra. I have so appreciated that. Do insist, as is spelled out in BOCC contract, that at least two weeks of the furlough is spent with family/on vacation.
- b. **Take care of them when they come home on furlough,** provide a car, a place to stay, cell phone, working funds and salary even though they are not on the field. Hendersonville in Nashville, and BOCC for the most part did very well at this for us. The ITCM Board takes very good care of us when we are back and in general.
- c. Listen to us, and not just during assemblies. When missionaries come back to the states on furlough we have undergone a lot of expense and effort to come back and report and then we find often that **people want to talk about other things all the time and never our work, our churches, our people here.** Yana and I still recall when we first came back after being gone for two years we went to someone's house the day after we arrived and all they talked about was remodeling and houses and cars and totally ignored us. So, why we were there again? Of course some of this may have to do with the fact that people don't know what to say around a minister or missionary so they make whatever conversation they can.

### 6. Vacations

Give your missionary more than the American standard of two weeks off a year. Often your missionary works more than 40 hours a week, sometimes double, and it takes a toll. Furlough does not count. The entry level employee vacation in Russia is 26 days. A missionary should receive no less. Often they are under large emotional, spiritual and other stresses and need time off and rest. Brentwood gave me up to a month vacation several years in a row and I appreciated it. I will have almost 5 weeks this year. One week with Yana just the two of us, two weeks caring



for my ailing mom, and two weeks at Christmas as a whole family. I think that is culturally appropriate and I don't think I could survive emotionally or spiritually without it.

### **7. Spiritual and personal growth**

Ask about the missionary's and family's personal spiritual lives. Few have ever asked us about that. Also ask, and hold your missionary accountable, for his marriage. Too few have inquired about that. Marriages undergo incredible strain on the field. More young couples should be warned away from mission work as it is not for the weak of heart. When I was having a difficult time personally with burnout feelings a few years ago my supporters did arrange for to talk to Steve Allison at ACU and that was helpful.

### **8. Prayer**

Lastly, if American worship assemblies, bible studies and small groups we visit when back are any indication, our home, supporting churches rarely mention missionaries or the cities and churches where we work by name in prayer during worship or group meetings. There is power when people pray together and untold things happen and don't when people back in the states pray for us. One of our supporting churches breaks the mold here as one who does, often, in public (and private) prayer mention churches and missionaries and special needs from the field. I had a wonderful conversation with a brother in the states about his prayer for a sister here during the Sunday morning worship assembly when her mom was dying and it was so encouraging to her to know that the church there was praying for her in addition to helping financially. I receive a weekly newsletter of another church that graciously supports us financially and takes wonderful care of us on furloughs but never once in 9 years have we been listed in the bulletin for prayer. Pray for us more.

Also, the small, inexpensive book "For Missionaries Only" by Joe Cannon, available on amazon.com, is a must read for supporting churches or anyone who wants to offer care to missionaries. It is a series of vignettes on scriptures and missionary life. Hilarious and true.