



## Principles of Missionary Care

Every Christian is called to live out and teach the Good News of Jesus Christ to their family, neighbors, and friends. Christians are called to be missionaries. Some Christians are called to become fulltime missionaries to nonbelievers. They are most often fully supported by the church of Jesus Christ.

Missionaries are worthy of missionary care. Missionary care is carried out by the local body of believers that sends out the missionary. By caring for their missionaries, the local church helps missionaries adjust to the rigors of cross-cultural work and thus enables the missionary to fulfill his/her objectives of reaching the lost for Jesus Christ. By providing missionary care, the church protects the missionary, his/her family and his/her team.

### Why is this important?

Missionary work is inherently stressful. Ministry itself is a hazardous occupation! It exposes one to the deepest needs of humanity, many of which can never really be met. The values inherent in ministry are for self-giving and self-sacrifice. Ministry calls for change—change in self, change in others, and change in society. Ministry is never finished. There is always more to do. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to measure a ministry's success. Feelings of failure and opportunities for burnout among those who are ministers are inherent in this work. While stress can be a source of growth, and although many ministers withstand the rigors of their work without adverse side effects, many others do not.

*Choosing to minister across cultures compounds the hazards almost geometrically. In addition to the hazards of ministry itself, going cross-cultural means adding layer upon layer of complexity. One steps out of one's own context, exchanging it for a whole new set of struggles and challenges. Change of culture brings with it changes of language, value systems, climate, geography, social systems, role definitions and a host of other life elements. Usually, a life of ministry across cultures places one in a position to experience potential high levels of stress, as almost everything in one's self and one's life must adapt to new realities<sup>1</sup>.*

There are some guiding principles sending churches need to think about in order to care for their missionaries, their families, and their teams.

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<sup>1</sup> Dodd & Dodd, [Stressed from Core to Cosmos: Issues and Needs Arising from Cross-Cultural Ministry](#), Heartstream Resources, Inc., 1997, p.1

## **Principle One**

The sponsoring congregation has a written missionary care policy that accepts the overall responsibility for helping the missionaries and their families and teams deal with the rigors of cross-cultural ministry.

The congregation does this by educating their missionaries about the rigors of the work on the field, specific risks involved, and offers specific strategies for dealing with both normative and non-normative stresses inherent in mission life.

## **Principle Two**

The church systematically screens and/or assesses the suitability of cross-cultural ministers as part of the process of employment.

This means that the sponsoring church has the responsibility to understand the minimum physical, spiritual, and emotional health requirements for mission assignments. Prospective cross-cultural workers are screened with respect to the factors possibly affecting the likelihood of adverse or maladaptive response to the risks and stresses of mission work. Assessment in each of the areas—physical, spiritual, 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.

## **Principle Three**

The church sends spiritually mature, emotionally stable, prepared, and well-trained missionaries to the field.

## **Principle Four**

The church maintains interest in the missionaries on the field and monitors their work. The church is aware of the missionaries' living environment and provides ongoing, appropriate care as the missionaries, their families, and teams adjust to cross-cultural living and ministry.

## **Principle Five**

The church provides training and support, on an ongoing basis. Team building and management of any team conflict are high priorities. Family care is not neglected. The church understands that missionaries live in ongoing cultural stress even after adjustment. The church intentionally seeks ways to nurture their missionaries spiritually.

## **Principle Six**

The church provides missionaries with specific support in any critical incident (traumatic event) and other unusual and unexpected sources of severe stress.

### **Principle Seven**

The church provides both practical and emotional support of missionaries during furloughs and upon final re-entry. 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.

### **Principle Eight**

The church will see that returned missionaries receive the spiritual and emotional care they need if they have been adversely affected by exposure to stress and trauma through their work.