

Missionary Care Teams (MCT = TLC): A Personal Testimony

By **ELIZABETH GEORGE, REBEKAH & CHRIS MEREDITH**

Elizabeth George has served as a teacher in a creative-access country. She greatly values the relationship she has with her sending church, and views it as one of the reasons she has been sustained on the field.

Rebekah and Chris Meredith served as Elizabeth's advocates and leaders of MCT at Antioch for many years until moving out of state. They continue to support many Antioch Distributed Members even while living in Minnesota.



Antioch Church in Louisville, Kentucky just celebrated the 10-year anniversary of its Missionary Care Team (MCT) in January 2022. This small church, with around 100 members, currently has 7 families and 2 single women sent out from its body and has cared for 25 families or singles on the mission field since 2012. Its declaration, “We pursue intentional gospel relationships to proclaim Christ’s glory among the nations” has drawn and encouraged missions-minded Christians since its inception. The church’s desire to intentionally pursue gospel relationships extends not only to the lost, but to those from its membership who take the gospel to the nations.

The development of the MCT at Antioch Church was very organic, as it grew out of a shared experience by some of its members. The idea for the MCT was planted by God simultaneously in the hearts of three members of Antioch. Elizabeth had served overseas for two years in a very challenging setting with little support from home. She had been sent out by a large congregation, and she felt forgotten. Even as she left Africa depleted and disappointed, she did not waiver from the conviction that God had called her to missions. When she returned from the field, suffering from burnout, she was eager to find a church that was passionate about missions and would be supportive of its sent ones. She knew

she would return overseas when better prepared and with much more support. Chris and Rebekah had been friends with Elizabeth for years and their relationship was rekindled once they all joined Antioch. Chris and Rebekah had not realized the depth of struggles Elizabeth had faced during her overseas term and wanted to help her return to the field in a healthier way. After one particular sermon, each of their hearts was stirred to do something together that would allow Antioch to care for its missionaries.

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Their idea consisted of a team of church members who would be responsible and accountable to support the sent ones. They envisioned, not a committee with a few people involved, but missionary care to be woven into the fabric of church life. They desired a concerted, purposeful effort to get as many people involved so that missionaries



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were a constant conversation in Antioch families. Because not every missionary had the same process, MCT would help as needed with logistics, commissioning, advocacy, etc. This team would meet regularly and pray for the missionaries, would help coordinate sending out and welcoming home, would assist with logistics, would be a voice for the missionaries to the church as a whole—encouraging prayer and connection. For each missionary, MCT might look different in its application but would be consistent in its desire—to be a support network. Elizabeth, Chris, and Rebekah met with the elders of the church to present their dream and the Missionary Care Team was born.



The initial meetings of the MCT gathered mission-minded Antioch members in a home, sharing ideas about what MCT could be and do. Many had previously served overseas, some planned to eventually work overseas, and others—like Chris and Rebekah—cared about God’s mission and the people He chose to send. Early on, it was proposed that our missionaries would be labeled “Distributed Members,” recognizing their continued membership in the church, their role as part of us but “distributed”

or sent out to a specific place, and the need to speak carefully about certain workers and the places they served. It was paramount for the church, through the MCT, to create layers of care and accountability for each of the Distributed Members. Each would choose an advocate, a person or couple who would be the first line of communication and connection. Advocates would be the liaison between the wider church body and the sent one; they would come to MCT meetings and share news and prayer requests from their missionaries. When life gets overwhelming abroad, the Advocate takes the initiative to reach out and invite interaction. If an Advocate was not fulfilling expectations, then the greater group of MCT members would be able to check with both the Distributed Member and the Advocate to ensure connections were being maintained. A system of checks and balances was created by this structure.

The Distributed Member-Advocate relationship is foundational to Antioch’s care for its missionaries. One Distributed Member, describing her relationship with her Advocate, said it “isn’t just her listening to me and talking about me, we have a real two-way relationship where I care about what is going on with her. Things like that also make it easier when we come back, I still feel connected and loved in Kentucky.” This dual commitment, sharing life even across miles and oceans, takes work on both sides. It means the Distributed Member continues to share their concerns and also asks about the Advocate and Antioch. The relationship is upheld in regular communication. **Advocacy is missionary care.**

MCT also started a prayer calendar, featuring photos of the Distributed Members, one family or single for each month, encouraging Antioch members to pray for the sent ones. Other ways to bring the Distributed Members before the church have been implemented through the years, including a slide with the missionary’s photo on the screen as people filter in for church on Sunday mornings with time set aside during the Sunday morning service to specifically pray for that Distributed Member. MCT has also hosted specific prayer times for God’s work

among the nations and our specific ones sent out. Family groups are an integral part of the life of Antioch, and Distributed Members are encouraged to visit each family group when stateside to share about their work and their lives and to engender more personal connections. Additionally, these small groups are encouraged to pray for a specific Distributed Member each week. **Prayer is missionary care.**



Each time Distributed Members are sent out, whether for the first time or to return to their field, they are prayed over in our Sunday morning gathering.

Not long after its formation, the MCT began planning for an important event—the welcoming home of a couple and their adult son from a career of good and faithful service. This couple had been involved in the planting of Antioch while in Louisville on their final stateside visit before retirement. They had continued to pray for Antioch in its initial years of growth, and to be prayed for by Antioch. Months before their anticipated return, Antioch and the MCT planned a trip to visit this family, sending five members for two weeks. The team was not certain how God would use their time, but the Lord had beautiful plans for this trip. During their more than 30 years of overseas work, this family had never received a team from a supporting church to come alongside and witness the work they were doing. Antioch’s team was able to meet this family’s beloved colleagues, neighbors, and

mentors, was able to visit places of importance and was able to see and experience their life. When this couple and their son returned to Louisville, they had forged memories together with other Antioch members about a place so near and dear to their hearts with others in their church home. These missionaries felt so loved by this trip, and it softened the blow of culture shock and resettlement in Louisville. **Visiting is missionary care.**

Another important function of MCT at Antioch is “sending out” our Distributed Members. Because our members are affiliated with a number of organizations, the way they are sent or commissioned may look different. Some have been commissioned by their organization with a large gathering at their headquarters. When one long-standing family was sent to the mission field last summer, Antioch celebrated alongside them with Caribbean food and stories of their impact and moments of prayer as they prepared to depart for Grenada. These celebrations offer an opportunity for fond farewells, for recognition of deep connections to Antioch, for healthy grief as friends transition to another country, and for rejoicing in how God is at work. Each time Distributed Members are sent out, whether for the first time or to return to their field, they are prayed over in our Sunday morning gathering. Antioch gathers around and lays hands on those leaving, as a sign of heartfelt prayers and blessing upon them to go into the nations, proclaiming the gospel. These are often prayers spoken through tears, grateful and grieving, as God calls some to leave Antioch to go into all the world. **Sending out is missionary care.**

Antioch MCT has changed over the years, but the central aim has been the same—to pursue intentional gospel relationships with our own Distributed Members. We do this by staying connected through the Advocate and the members of MCT, by praying for one another, by caring for our missionaries in word and deed, and by bringing their work and lives before the greater Antioch body. MCT has been a support net for those called out by God into the nations, proclaiming Christ’s glory to the ends of the earth. 🌍