

Learning How to Care For Our “Sent Ones”



BY RICK WOOD | Editor of *Mission Frontiers* | rick.wood@frontierventures.org

If you ask mission workers if they feel adequately cared for by their sending churches, most will likely say, “Not as much as we would like.” The relationship between the sending church and the “sent ones” can be complicated with many factors getting in the way of doing a good job of sending people well and caring for them while they are on the field. It takes lots of time, energy, vision and commitment for a church to do it well. In this issue we provide stories of churches who are doing it well. But what are some of the things that get in the way of churches caring well for their mission workers?

Ignorance of the Mission

A majority in the church don't understand the mission of the global Church. The people in the church cannot adequately care for the mission workers sent if the members do not understand or have a commitment or passion for the mission. As reported in the Nov-Dec 2019 issue of *MF*, only 37% of Christians can identify the Great Commission passage in Matt. 28:18-20 when it is read to them. Those who know it well are likely even less than 37%. That means that only 37% have any idea of what Jesus has asked us to do in missions. Therefore, at best, only 37% will care about the mission of the church and those sent to carry it out. Matt. 28:18-20 should be the core vision and identity of every follower of Jesus, but it is not, and our missionaries suffer neglect because it is not. Because the church does not understand its mission, many workers are sent out to do things that do not help accomplish this mission. Only a very small fraction of mission workers is sent to start movements to Christ within the unreached peoples. This is the same problem Dr. Ralph Winter identified in 1974—most mission workers are sent to serve the existing church around the world, not those who have never heard. Every sending church should have a missions priority grid that prioritizes the sending of mission workers to those people groups with the least access to the gospel, often referred to as Frontier Peoples. It

must be the job of pastors to catch this vision and then pass it on to their church members. How often do you hear Matt. 28:18-20 quoted in your church services? Likely, not very often and that is the problem.

Caring More About Ourselves Than the Mission

It is a sad reality that 94% of the money given to the church stays within to bless the people of the church. Almost 6% is given to missions of all varieties and only 1.7% is given to the highest priority in missions of going to the unreached peoples. Out of every \$100 given to the church only \$1.70 is given to reach those who have never heard of Jesus or have little or no access to the gospel. As is reported on page 31, Americans spend more on golf balls and Twinkies than what is given to reach the unreached peoples. There is a severe imbalance in our priorities, and this is reflected in how we care for the mission workers who have given their lives for the cause of reaching the unreached. Where your money is, there goes your heart. Is it any surprise that the hearts of God's people are not with those who are carrying out this mission? The church should do better than 1.7%. That is not even 2 cents of every dollar given. But unless the vision of God's people increases, giving to reach the unreached is unlikely to improve.

Out of Sight, Out of Mission

The missionary enterprise has an inherent flaw: the people most committed to the mission of the church are not in regular contact each week with their home church that has sent them to make disciples of all nations. They are not at church talking with fellow church members before or after the service each week. They are not attending home groups or Bible studies throughout the week. They are not able to share their passion and mission vision with the very people they depend upon for the resources to carry out their mission. Over time this distance creates increasing ignorance of who these “sent ones” are

and why the church sent them out in the first place. Over time these mission workers become strangers to their home church which often leads to a discontinuance of prayer and financial support. This issue of *MF* is all about what the church and its sent ones can do to overcome this problem and to make sure that the precious saints we send out are properly cared for and supported in their vital mission.

My wife and I have lived on missionary support for 32 years now and this issue was inspired by our experiences, both good and bad from interacting with churches and individual supporters. My wife, Lorena, was a huge help in pulling together the articles for this issue. I asked her to share some of her thoughts on caring well for our mission workers.

Lorena Wood on Serving Well as Senders

Our cover title *The Proper Care and Nurturing (Feeding) of Our Mission Workers* may sound a bit familiar. I read Dr. Laura Schlessinger's common-sense book titled *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*. I just couldn't get that title out of my mind as I worked to find great articles and examples of those churches doing it well for this theme issue of *Mission Frontiers*. And yes, this is my first ever time bringing a theme issue together, so I hope you won't be too critical of me in your reviews. I wanted to help the editor, my husband, to have a break from the constant treadmill of pushing out one issue after another. I also really felt that I wanted to create a "manual" of sorts that could be sent to churches and pastors in the hope of blessing missionaries even more. Don't worry, I'm not thinking this will be the definitive work on caring for mission workers like Eric Metaxas' book on Martin Luther. I just want to do my small part in highlighting the wonderful authors and resources in this issue for you to learn from, connect with and share with others.

Wouldn't it be great if we could encourage those that our churches send out, or dare I even say, those we partner with individually who are on the front lines of breaking Satan's grasp on the 7,000 unreached peoples still living in darkness? Wouldn't it be incredible if we could help the local church who has workers on the field do their job a bit better in letting the supported know they haven't been forgotten and that we have taken the time to grow ourselves and educate others

in the area of caring well for those who have been entrusted to us? There is an array of authors in this issue whose expertise can be so life giving if we take their advice and apply it in caring for our workers.

For the line-up we have a spectrum of articles about missionary support ranging from kids to senior leadership.

Valerie Williams/TEAM defines ways to help missionary kids feel valuable on home assignment and shares seven key ways that a church can help missionary kids.

Neil Pirolo shares the biblical basis for sending workers out well.

Stan Parks shares three priorities for every sending body.

Q & A with Dorothy (Dot) Everett, a "just getting started" 86-year-old worker who has served for 65+ years in missions. Just because one may be eight decades old does not mean the work is done. This is a great perspective piece and Dot is an example worth following.

"Elizabeth" serving in a highly sensitive area helps us understand how to meet the specific needs of a female worker in her article, *A Witnessed Life*.

Bradly Bell, a lead pastor and former missionary steps in and shares his wisdom and advice on the importance of real connection to our workers. He gives first-hand accounts of being on the field and in the pulpit.

See the article by E. George and the Merediths on their four "missionary care" resolutions and the course one church took to implement a church-wide support team for their missionaries.

Another very helpful piece is Nathan Sloan's piece on Advocacy Teams. Not only does he have the perspective of living on the field as a missionary, but he also has the wisdom gained from being the executive director of Upstream Collective where his team works tenaciously on church-centric global sending. They are a wonderful resource with hundreds of articles related to this very issue.

I hope this issue is a great blessing to you and the mission workers you serve. 