

Missions

Some mission leaders are increasingly concerned about the declining character and readiness of many applicants for overseas service. While this is a generalisation, since the Baby Boom generation, those born after World War two, there has been a growing tendency to over emphasise personal rights, guard days off, expect a certain standard of living, and seek high-quality education for children. Self-denial and surrendering personal desires seem to be unpopular themes today, so they need renewed emphasis.

Requirements for overseas service

1. *Growing spiritually mature.* This is a necessity. Many countries have more of the working of the Spirit than we have in the West, therefore missionaries must not hold back the national church because of a narrow vision that they can so easily have.
2. *A servant heart.* One intending missionary avoided helping us clean up a building that the church had taken over. Her excuse was that she didn't have time, even though she was unemployed. As was predicted, her term of service did not last long overseas and now she isn't worshipping anywhere. Do not give the impression that missionaries are a cut above other Christian workers so that people are drawn to the prestige element. If however, people are failing on the field let them know it is all right for them to return home and still be valued members of the church.
3. *Proven giftings.* People sent out must first have proven their ability and dedication at home. For example, if they are going to evangelise overseas, they must first have had experience in evangelism at home. Only the best of our personnel should go overseas. Be unselfish in releasing them.
4. *Cultural sensitivity.* The person going out needs a humble open heart to learn from the nationals and of course must not be racially prejudiced. Most missionary organisations take several weeks or even months in preparing people to adapt to overseas service, having learnt from the mistakes made in the past.

Personality tests can help identify a person's strengths and weaknesses, but it is worth noting that some people rejected by missionary societies have gone on to serve very effectively on the mission field. However, such cases are the exception rather than the rule.

Ways to promote Missions

- Inspiring Sunday mission spots.
- Leadership seen to be giving strong support to overseas missions.
- Special missionary weekends, with guest missionaries.
- Annual missions convention.
- A daily prayer church calendar.
- Tithing the Sunday offering to missions.
- Sending out of teams.
- Linking up with a national worker or church and developing a sense of them being part of your church family.

Overseas teams

Over recent years many articles have been written for and against short term teams going overseas. That is, excluding work teams who work with nationals.

Advantages

1. People may end up by going to the mission field long term.
2. Even if they stay at home they may - promote missions, pray effectively and become financially involved
3. Trust God for their own expenses and see answers to prayer.
4. Be an encouragement to the missionary overseas.
5. Short term mission teams is now the primary way that young people are becoming involved in and committed to missions. Mission groups that do not cater for mission experience will lose out in the long run.

Disadvantages

1. May cause disruption to the missionary and the work.
2. Their input may not be very effective.
3. The expense involved may seem to be a waste of money. However, I firmly believe that if a team receives an invitation by folk overseas and the visitors become more culturally sensitive and increase their faith in God it will be of profit all round.

Suggested policy for overseas short-term team preparation

1. People need to apply to belong to a team.
2. The team and team leader will be appointed by the Missionary chairperson along with the pastor and elders.
3. Team members must meet regularly, at least two months before they move out overseas for:
 - prayer and fellowship.
 - training in outreach etc.
 - gaining insight into the new culture.

Finances

Each person is responsible for raising the money for their own airfares and general expenses. People short of money are also encouraged to pray in the extra amount and work for it if necessary. Team members should not borrow money for the trip and all outstanding accounts should be cleared before embarking overseas.

If a garage sale is held to raise money, then the proceeds will normally go into a common account to offset expenses for the whole team. Occasionally an individual may receive an extra amount from a church member.

If accommodation and overseas travelling expenses are unknown, then a certain amount of money must be paid into a common fund before leaving the home country.

Someone apart from the team leader should manage the finances and a financial record should be always kept. This releases the team leader for other responsibilities.

The team overseas

The team will endeavour to have a daily team meeting for prayer and to discuss the activities coming up for the day.

Where there is a busy ministry schedule it is important that one day a week is taken for relaxation without any ministry responsibilities. When ministering in the tropics it is strongly advisable to have an afternoon siesta. Initially you may feel relaxation is unwarranted, but without it you and the team will probably not last the distance.

The home church

Any news received from the team overseas should be communicated to the church. Regular prayer is encouraged in supporting the team overseas.

When the team returns home

Prepare the team for their homecoming. They need a humble grateful attitude for what God has done and warn the team that they will normally find it hard to settle back into a routine for a while.

Allow them ample time to report back to the church. This may be done during a service or special evening arranged. It is of vital importance that the team does not make fun of the foreign culture. Tell funny stories if you wish, but not at the expense of putting people down. Too many people are insensitive to other cultures.

Missionary support

In sending out missionaries we must support them in every possible way. Some suggestions are mentioned in the Missionary Policy. However, a lot of prayer and wisdom is necessary in understanding how best to *financially support* the candidate. Various missionary organisations have different policies and the church must work alongside these.

Different individuals will be drawn to giving to different needs so provide publicity regarding varying situations needing support:

- starving children
- persecuted Christians
- national workers

literacy and book distribution
Bible translation
teaching/medical/training
programs/orphanages, etc.

The church must not hastily commit itself to the financial support of a missionary candidate, otherwise it may regret it in the long term. Once financial support is given, the church needs to stand by that missionary for a defined period. It should be for their whole term of service overseas, unless otherwise stated. There is nothing worse than for missionaries to find themselves financially embarrassed, while in another country.

Bear in mind, that individuals within any congregation will also support that missionary, on top of the church's financial commitment. Unfortunately, there will always be individuals who will redirect their tithe from the church towards the missionary going out, as the latter has more personal appeal, but this will cause a short fall in the general giving of the church. If the short fall is too great, it could strangle the general fund of the church reducing its commitments to other people.

Church leadership needs to know the difference between moving forward in faith on the one hand and irresponsible financial commitments on the other. The dividing line is hard to find at times. It can only come through prayer, time and discussion.

Forward planning

Local churches need to consider linking up with sister national churches in other countries to exchange and train leadership. This can work in both directions. We should also consider inviting more potential national students to our own country for training before returning home. Nationals are the best people to work among nationals.

These options along with others must be thoroughly thought through.