



## Missionary Care Team Responsibilities

By Dr. Dorris Schulz

***If God cares about the message, He must care about the messenger.***

The purpose of missionary care is to help missionaries remain whole throughout each stage of the missionary career life cycle. It involves supportive relationships and services which promote the missionary's ongoing adjustment and growth.<sup>1</sup>

Missionary Care is the extension of the 'one another care' that takes place in the local church. It is a combination of pastoral care, Christian counseling and/or mentoring and human resource development, i.e., helping missionaries develop needed competencies through formal and/or informal training opportunities. Care is intentional and planned. So that purposeful and meaningful care of missionaries occurs (does not fall through the cracks), church leaders often form Missionary Care Teams from among qualified members to do this specific work.

Care Team members should be people the missionaries trust and in whom they have confidence. Qualified Care Team Members have a vital, authentic, and growing relationship with the Lord. They are seen by congregational leaders as wise, emotionally and spiritually mature, compassionate, humble, trustworthy, cooperative, not easily intimidated, with the ability to confront when necessary, strongly dedicated to truth, able to keep confidences and who have an understanding of the rigors of cross-cultural ministry. They need to be able to commit to the time needed to meet periodically with other Care Group members, with the missionaries, through use of technology, and personally on occasion, and meet with and report to the leadership.

Care Team Groups consist of members from different age groups, young to older, both married and single, parents and non-parents, male and female, and blessed with differing spiritual gifts and maturing experiences.

Missionary Care Teams are passionate about the mission of God and 'in spirit' come along side and accompany their missionaries to the field. They, first and foremost, are advocates for the missionaries they care for. Their aim is to care for and build up individual missionaries as a total person, so that s/he will be able to live and minister as a spiritually/emotionally healthy and effective individual. In times of cumulative stress and trauma they are able to access resources to help their missionaries.

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<sup>1</sup> John Powell in Kelly O'Donnell (Ed.), *Missionary Care*. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1992

Some underlying assumptions the leadership, the missionary care team and the church need to be aware of are:

- Missionaries are people like everyone else with basic human needs, except they experience these needs in a cross-cultural and sometimes cross-racial context, far from home and often with fewer resources, thus they experience more stress.
- Missionaries experience continuing cultural stress of varying degrees:
  - Culture shock
    - Loss of cultural cues
    - Unfamiliar laws, rules, codes of conduct, visa restrictions
    - Unfamiliar foods
    - Different housing situations
    - Different transportation needs
    - Value differences
    - Different frustrations; hassles
    - Temperament differences
    - Separation from family and everything familiar
    - Climate changes
    - Unaware of what is safe and what is unsafe
  - Language learning is difficult, time consuming, and constant
  - Even in more modern cultures, daily living outside the U.S. is more difficult; it takes more time to complete normal tasks; in third world countries, the difficulty increases exponentially.
  - Relationships, with people from the host culture, occur only after a long period of time of building trust; lack of close relationships sometimes leads missionaries to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation
  - Making a difference in people's lives, often fraught with difficulties, requires enormous amounts of emotional energy
  - Missionaries report that their top stressors are:
    - financial pressure
    - overwork
    - language barriers
    - maintaining spiritual disciplines
    - cultural stress
    - being under-staffed
    - feeling inadequate
    - conflict with co-workers
    - concerns about aging parents
    - needs of children
    - leadership styles
    - loneliness

Missionaries want missionary care, fellowship, and accountability with their stewarding church. When working with a congregationally based Missionary Care Team, they need to know that the Care Team's interests in serving them are only for their well-being, their

personal and spiritual growth and for their success on the field. Therefore, the team needs people who will:

- Listen and who will provide them a safe place to vent and provide confidentiality concerning sensitive information they share (venting should not become a prayer concern for the church)
- Help them find ways to use their gifts in their roles
- Help them foster friendship with co-workers
- Provide regular debriefing
- Provide regular accountability
- Prayer partnership
- Help them find freedom from financial pressures; assist them with finding new support when donors opt out
- Offer ways for them to promote mutual care within their on-field team
- Help them learn to lead others better
- Promote visits from home from themselves, elders, mission leader, care group members

#### **The duties of the Missionary Care Team would be to:**

- Communicate: Send emails with personal news; news of members of their home congregation
- Be patient concerning replies to your emails; internet access and adequate band width is not universal
- Remember special occasions with cards
- Send care packages: small gifts of things they might miss; iTunes cards that allow missionaries to download music and movies (if internet is good – otherwise DVD's might be preferred gift)
- Record/video special occasions so that the missionaries feel a part of what is going on at 'home'
- Let them know you are praying for them; email prayers; Skype/Face Time with missionaries during prayer times for them; send encouraging scripture passages
- Send Kindle or Nook gift cards or a copy of a good book; magazines or links to encouraging web-sites; remember, most missionaries will not have access to Christian book stores

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY<sup>ii</sup>**

All Christians need accountability. Missionaries are expected to be accountable. No one is able to handle the battle alone. Accountability provides protection, promotes growth, encourages fellowship, and can be an encouragement. Accountability is biblical. All Christians are accountable to God for their words (Matt. 12:36), for their talents (Matt. 25:14-30), for their behavior (Matt. 25:31-46, for their use of time (Eph 5:16, Col. 4:5) and more (Rom. 14:10, II Cor. 5:10). Multiple verses from Proverbs could be added here. Missionary Care Teams are accountability groups for missionaries. When talking with missionaries and keeping them accountable, what questions are

appropriate? Gordon McDonald<sup>iii</sup> iv has a list of 26 questions that can be used as guidelines.

### **Accountability Questions by Gordon MacDonald**

1. How is your relationship with God right now?
2. What have you read in the Bible in the past week?
3. What has God said to you in this reading?
4. Where do you find yourself resisting Him these days?
5. What specific things are you praying for in regard to others?
6. What specific things are you praying for in regard to yourself?
7. What are the specific tasks facing you right now that you consider incomplete?
8. What habits intimidate you?
9. What have you read in the secular press this week?
10. What general reading are you doing?
11. What have you done to play?
12. How are you doing with your spouse? Kids?
13. If I were to ask your spouse about your state of mind, state of spirit, state of energy level, what would the response be?
14. Are you sensing any spiritual attacks from the enemy right now?
15. If Satan were to try to invalidate you as a person or as a servant of the Lord, how might he do it?
16. What is the state of your sexual perspective? Tempted? Dealing with fantasies? Entertainment?
17. Where are you financially right now? (Things under control? under anxiety? in great debt?)
18. Are there any unresolved conflicts in your circle of relationships right now?
19. When was the last time you spent time with a good friend of your own gender?
20. What kind of time have you spent with anyone who is a non-Christian this past month?
21. What challenges do you think you're going to face in the coming week? Month?
22. What would you say are your fears at this present time?
23. Are you sleeping well?
24. What three things are you most thankful for?
25. Do you like yourself at this point in your pilgrimage?
26. What are your greatest confusions about your relationship with God?

Missionary Care Teams ask the hard questions because the missionary's relationship with Christ and his/her neighbor are fundamental to his/her wellbeing, success, and productivity. The church should be committed to not only the growth and development of themselves, but of those they send. Those they send are one of their most valuable assets.

Missionary Care Team responsibilities would also include helping missionaries who have been wounded or who are hurting, either because of sin they have committed or because they are victims of someone else's sin, anger issues, conflict, burnout,

substance abuse, other harmful patterns of behavior, distressed marriages, pornography use, exposure to a traumatic incident or natural disaster or any issue the national leaders deem important enough to inform the committee about. The Care Team would then meet with the missionary for whatever length of time needed in order to restore that person gently, watching out for themselves (Gal. 6:1) and to offer comfort (2 Cor. 1:3). In the case of sin, the team would determine when restoration has occurred by noting positive character changes, positive lifestyle changes, positive relational changes, renewed relationship with God and enhanced family and close relationships.<sup>v</sup> These meetings should remain confidential. However, at the same time Missionary Care Groups need to be aware of their limitations. It should be agreed upon and understood, that when a Care Team is dealing with matters that are beyond their competency, professional help will be sought to assist them and/or their missionaries. The rules for reporting confidential information and to whom, needs to be mapped out carefully and publicized so that there is no confusion and trust is maintained.<sup>vi</sup>

It is the duty of the missionary, when reporting to their Care Team, to act maturely, to be vulnerable (non-defensive), transparent, respectful, humble, and open to instruction. This posture can occur when both the missionary and the Care Team are careful to be respectful and honoring to each other.

God could have reached the world in various ways, but he chose human beings to be his messengers. He chose the church to be his sending agency and he asks of his people that they care for one another. Missionary Care Teams are one method of putting the 'one-another' passages to work in an international context. Never underestimate the importance of care. Missionary Care is all about helping missionaries stay healthy so that by all means, all men may come to knowledge of the good news of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>i</sup> Brenda Bosch surveyed over 2,200 missionaries from a broad spectrum of nations, nationalities and sending agencies.  
<http://fulfilledmissionary.com/2012/05/03/11-types-of-care-missionaries-want-from-their-sending-agencies-and-co-workers/>

<sup>ii</sup> Credit for this information needs to be given to Dr. Laura Mae Gardner, former Director of Member Care at Wycliffe, from whom I took copious notes when she presented these ideas on accountability during the Interim Session at the Summer Institute of Missions Seminar at Abilene Christian University in 2006

<sup>iii</sup> MacDonald, Gordon (1988) *Rebuilding Your Broken World*. Nashville, TN; Oliver-Nelson Books (recommended by Dr. Laura Mae Gardner)

<sup>iv</sup> Another source to guide conversations with missionaries and their children can be found at:  
<http://wellnessinventory.blogspot.com>

<sup>v</sup> Edlin, Steven G., M.A. and David, Pamela S., Ph.D. (2013) *Mending the Net: A Care Team Approach to Healing and Restoration for Missionaries ; TEAM*; [www.team.org](http://www.team.org)

<sup>vi</sup> Attached to this document is an article written by Dr. Becky Holton, Director of Missionary Care for Great Cities Missions on moral failure, used with permission from this ministry.