

BEST PRACTICE DOCUMENT

for FIEC churches supporting missionaries

INTRODUCTION

In recent years many mission agencies have endeavoured to work alongside local churches to help bring the Gospel to all nations, thus giving the local church of Christ its proper place in world mission. The **FIEC** Overseas Relationships Team have prepared the following document for all **FIEC** churches supporting missionaries, to raise awareness of the local church's responsibilities in world mission and encourage partnership between the local church, their missionary and the mission agency. Several of the issues mentioned in this document are shared responsibilities of the local church with the appropriate mission agency. We would welcome any comments or suggestions you may have. Please contact us via the **FIEC** office.

Thank you.

FIEC Overseas Relationships Team

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1. The churches responsibilities in helping members discern the call of God.

Pastors with a global missionary vision are essential if churches are to understand and fulfil the imperatives of the Great Commission. In churches without pastors these responsibilities should be encouraged by those in leadership with similar vision and commitment.

- a. Teach the Biblical basis of mission.
- b. Arrange mission activities e.g.
 - missionary speakers
 - mission week-ends
 - encourage visits to mission field
 - prayer for overseas and home missions
 - support mission agencies or individual missionaries
- c. Help members of the church to discern the call of God and to link up with appropriate Mission Agencies.
- d. Work closely with the mission agencies in all aspects of pastoral care, welfare, prayer and financial support of their missionaries.

2. What the church needs to know from mission agencies.

- a. Doctrinal statement/basis of faith.
- b. main aims and ministries.
- c. leadership structure.
- d. selection process.
- e. financial policy – including pensions and insurances.
- f. home assignment policy.
- g. health and holidays policy.
- h. pastoral care in location.

3. Preparation of potential members.

- a. Role of the church is to enable members to hear and respond to the call of God, to give opportunities for identifying and developing spiritual and natural gifting.
- b. Both church and Bible College can discuss strengths and weaknesses, ministering into needs, strengthening weaknesses and developing skills and gifting. Both sides need to be honest in appraisal of individuals and the role they could play.
- c. Reliability and effectiveness in Christian service must be proved within the local church prior to serious consideration of an overseas assignment.

4. Candidate selection procedure.

These are a joint activity led by the Mission Agency.

- a. They follow a clear pattern, and the outcome is understood by all.
- b. It is sometimes possible and helpful for a sending church leader to be present at the final interview.
- c. Reasons for the location of members are clearly given, showing appreciation of the individual's skills, training and calling, and knowledge of the situation by the agency.
- d. Decisions throughout the selection process give recognition to God's leading, and should therefore reflect unanimity among all concerned.

5. What does a Mission Agency need to know from a Sending Church?

- a. Honest reference from the most appropriate person.
- b. Commitment and stability regarding finance.
- c. Support by way of prayer, interest, letters, and good encouraging home assignments.

6. The church can support their missionary, emotionally and practically, with the following activities, prior to their first term overseas.
 - a. buying, packing sending luggage in advance.
 - b. making specific arrangements for ageing parents and other dependants left behind.
 - c. packing up and cleaning the house, selling or letting.
 - d. making appropriate arrangement for the vehicle.
 - e. the church's responsibility of the commissioning service, together with the mission agency.
 - f. saying goodbyes and leaving home for the first time. The children may need extra support here - leaving friends, changing schools, moving to a foreign country etc.
 - g. transport to the airport.

7. How do the responsibilities of the sending churches to the mission and its missionaries work out in practice?
 - a. While overseas.
 - To find practical and effective ways of encouraging regular and informed prayer for its missionaries.
 - To appoint a link person to liaise between the Mission and the church and the missionaries, so that good communication is maintained concerning practical and pastoral arrangements.
 - Frequent letters, emails, tapes of services, periodicals from home are a great encouragement to the missionary, particularly during the first term before adjustment to the new environment has been made.
 - To appoint someone to help send out the missionaries' prayer letters.
 - To send at least one representative to an appropriate mission weekend or half-day conference each year.
 - To work with the mission leaders in relationship to the

pastoral care of the missionaries. This is a shared responsibility between the sending church, mission agency and the field leaders. Pastoral visits by church leaders and their input into the care of their missionaries are greatly appreciated.

- If appropriate, to keep in touch with the missionaries' family members in UK.
- To monitor the missionaries' financial situation, raising them as appropriate in church budget discussions, etc.

N.B. *FIEC has funds available to assist pastors and church leaders from UK to make overseas visits to encourage missionaries linked with their churches.*

b. While on Home Assignment

- Someone is appointed who will help them re-adjust to life in UK
- Appropriate accommodation is available
- To make preparations before the missionaries return, so that:
 - i. Practical arrangements are taken care of for the provision of a vehicle
 - ii. Schooling needs of children are met
 - iii. They are welcomed at the first Sunday service
- To initiate a de-briefing meeting of the church leaders with their missionaries early in the home assignment to discuss:
 - i. their spiritual development
 - ii. personal and family pastoral concerns
 - iii. their recent field experience
 - iv. financial considerations
 - v. plans for rest, study and deputation during their home assignment
 - vi. opportunities to report to all groups in the church and to have an active role in the fellowship during their home assignment
 - vii. future ministry and retirement (if appropriate)

- Make provisions for a re-commissioning service prior to their return to the field.

c. At End of Service and/or Retirement

The sending church should be encouraged to share the responsibility with the mission agency to prepare for end of service and/or retirement and in the transition itself with appropriate orientation, careers advice, financial counselling and pastoral care.

Re-Entry

For many missionaries, this can be a very stressful experience. It is helpful for the church to be aware of the following areas of stress, depending on the length of time spent overseas:

- a. Culture.
- b. Lack of status, sense of belonging, loss of identity.
- c. Housing/Finances/transport/Clothing
- d. Arranging education for the children.
- e. Arranging a holiday time of good spiritual refreshment.
- f. Deputation – sermons/power point.
- g. Relationship with home church.
- h. Arranging a Course of study.

THIRD CULTURE KIDS.

1. Pre- Field Orientation.

- a. Involve children in the whole process.
- b. It must be age appropriate.

2. Encourage children back home.

Older children may be studying at college or university in this country. Being a substitute family for your friend's children may be an immense relief for the parents as well as a help to their children. Consistency is important so plan a realistic level of sustained involvement.

Suggestions

- a. Write, or send a card from time to time, especially for their Birthday.
- b. Send a food parcel.
- c. Have them stay for a weekend or a holiday.

3. Whilst overseas.

- a. Have a link family in the Church who knows the TCK's well.
- b. Keep in contact via email, texts, letters and phone calls.
- c. Have a Church team visit the family where they work.
Receiving visitors from home is really special for the while family and is a great means of binding for the children and young people of a family when they return to the UK.

4. Furlough/Home Assignment.

What are their particular stress points?

- a. Culture – for some this is their first time in the UK, or since they could remember. Food, clothes, culture.
- b. Language – for some their English may not be very good.
- c. Loss of freedom to roam around outside.
- d. Loss of friends. Difficult to relate to kids their age in UK.
- e. School – very different to home schooling or mission school.
- f. Church – maybe very different to what they are used to. Lack of friends.
- g. Deputation – unsettled, don't appreciate having to 'perform', being nice to well meaning 'aunties and uncles'.

Suggestions.

- a. Avoid drawing too much attention to the children.
- b. Know the children by name.
- c. Offer support to children when coming home early/being here without parents.
- d. Integrate TCK's into youth groups/Junior Church.

Case Study 1 - A HARD WAY TO LEARN

How God used 'burn-out' to link a missionary with her church

During my first term in Africa, support from my home church had been rather minimal and my communication with them was only through a prayer letter three times a year. Having become a Christian away from home, I had never felt close to the church, and I was their first missionary. However the Lord used a difficult experience to make me realise that I desperately need their support.

When I came from Africa on home assignment I was suffering from 'burn-out' – complete emotional exhaustion. After weeks of struggling with inner turmoil I went to see the pastor. Through talking and praying together I received courage to share my experiences with the church at a mid-week meeting. Barriers were broken down by this and the fellowship began to accept me for who I was – not just 'the missionary on home assignment'. This led to a much greater bond between us.

A little while later, I faced the question 'Should I return to Africa?' The decision was too big for me to make on my own. My pastor and I discussed the biblical approach to missions regarding the responsibility of the home church and presented my question to the church members. After praying together as a fellowship and individually, the Lord revealed to us that it was His will for me to return. Three month later I was on the plane back to Africa!

Having the support of the church has made all the difference. I know I belong and that my work is one of its ministries. So often I am aware of being upheld by those praying for me particularly through times of difficulty. A weekly letter received from different members of the church is such an encouragement. This has encouraged me to reciprocate. Now a frequent letter to the church is a priority, together with a greater prayerful concern for the members and the activities of the church. I praise the Lord for the way He has strengthen the ties between church and missionary.

And her pastor comments:-

As a church we consider it both a privilege and a responsibility to care for our missionary. She is a vital part of the membership and it's response to God's love. She is in Africa because God has called her; both she and the church have acknowledged that call. If we fall short in our support, we see that as not just letting her down, but as sinning against God Himself.

Case-Study 2 - RE-ENTRY 1

When I returned from Zaire I felt I had lost my reason for living. Suddenly my friends, my home, my companion, my job, and my belongings were gone. I was too exhausted to think of a job and too insecure to consider beginning in a new situation.

The vast world of knowledge here at home was so overpowering that I felt completely 'out of it' in many areas. Machines frightened me. I hated using the telephone, and felt totally inadequate before a simple electronic calculator. I didn't know the books, movies, songs, street jargon, TV personalities and programmes or political developments that people were discussing.

I feared to contact old friends because they had a new circle of friends and new interests. I felt as though a portion of my life was missing, and that life had gone on without me. Children I had known were now adults. I no longer knew the little ones at church and had difficulty relating to the young people.

I had an uneasy feeling that people were playing a game and didn't know what life was all about. They never worried about where the next meal was coming from or how they would pay for a child's medical fees. They didn't have a whole clan of relatives depending on them, demanding gifts and favours.

Although I resented luxury and ease that I saw here, I found myself longing for it. I enjoyed the carefully and tastefully decorated homes and gardens. I drank in the beauty of flowers, fine china, expensive clothes and beautiful homes. Then would come the piercing memory of a frail mother crumpled at my feet begging for a bar of soap for her baby of a few hours old clutched under a dirty cloth, or students pleading for work to pay for a notebook, or a father wanting money for his sick child's medical care, or a married student begging for a blanket to keep his family warm at night, or a village girl taking our mangoes early in the morning to sell at the local market to get a few extra pennies.

What was life all about anyway? Did God really care? Was He angry with us in our bounty and luxury? How could I ever find meaning again in a culture that had everything and threw away more food and toys than some children would ever see? One man in a 're-entry' lecture to returned missionaries used more newspaper in one hour than we had been able to find for our student teachers in one year in Zaire. The prices of food, clothing and rent were staggering. I saved money on \$250 a month in Zaire and couldn't live on \$500 a month in Toronto.

The hardest thing to cope with has been my own spiritual struggle. I have

always found meaning in life by service to others and by sharing Christ with them. How can you help another person when you are fighting for faith and meaning yourself? How can you reach out to another when you feel he is superior to you in knowledge and in the business of daily life?

God has shown me slowly and painfully that I need to change myself, I need to grow, I need to know Him. He is not so interested in our service as in ourselves and our growth.

I have contacted old friends now after 2½ years at home, and I find that some of them have not changed. We pray and share together and find mutual strength. I've made new friends and find them to be wonderful people with a purpose and meaning in life.

I have had to go again and again to the written Word of God to stand in naked faith on what is written there. So many times I have had no feeling or else a feeling that nothing is worthwhile, and that God is far away. Then I claim God's promises knowing that He will make Himself real to me in His own timing. He has used friends over and over again to lift me up and encourage me just when I needed it most.

In Zaire I felt needed. It was a blow to my pride to realise I was not needed here. Probably 50 other people could do the job I am doing and many are lined up asking for it. People looked up to me and depended on me in Zaire. Here I depend so much on others and need to learn so many things over again. (Another blow to self esteem or pride).

I had idealised Canada thinking that the postal system would run smoothly, that you could trust people, that toilets and taps and cars would function properly. It was a shock to discover that mail strikes and thefts occur, people let you down, gadgets and machines break down, just as they do in Zaire.

I wanted security and release from political tension. I found that the threat of strikes and political turmoil there was just as upsetting as the uncertainty of the government in Zaire.

Gradually I have come to accept life here and to ask the Lord each day to make me contented where I am. I feel more at ease in this culture as time goes by and I know that as I seek the Lord's guidance daily He will show me how to know Him better and how to minister to others around me.

Some severe problems in interpersonal relationships developed, largely from my deep feelings of insecurity. I resented capable, super efficient people and

was afraid of them. I have ended up living with one and working with another! Through determination and in answer to prayer I am becoming more at ease with them.

In looking back I realise that insecurity has always been a problem for me. The adjustments in coming to Canada from Zaire only brought these feelings to the surface. I'm thankful for this experience. I have had to face up to myself and change. If I can grow and mature as a person through it all it is certainly worth it.

Case-study 3 - RE-ENTRY 2

'Re-Entry will not be too much of a problem for me' was my thinking on returning to UK after nearly 30 years in Africa. I had made a brief visit to England for a family wedding just 7 months prior to my final departure from Africa, so the final transition back to this country would be relatively easy!

Soon after my arrival home I realised that this was certainly not the case. The excitement of seeing friends and family again began to fade as other emotions reared their head. When the smallest demands were made of me my immediate reaction was to press the panic button. By the end of the first week I was physically and emotionally exhausted due to my varied experiences on the mission field and the subsequent loss of my life in Africa. I was entering into a period of bereavement that was to last for a long time.

As the weeks and months passed by, the dark clouds continued to descend. Feelings of hopelessness led to guilt and frustration. 'Surely after resting for so many months, I should be more active', I constantly told myself. My spiritual life had been meaningful in Africa. I now found it difficult to concentrate and prayer was a real effort. It seemed to me that friends at home did not know how to react to-wards me. For them my missionary career was over and I needed to settle into the UK mould. This led to feelings of a loss of identity that reached a crisis as I tried to grapple with my unanswered questions 'Who am I and where do I belong?'

During those confusing dark days the Lord did bring His peace and comfort through various means. I so appreciated people who were willing to listen and pray with me without passing judgement. Sharing with fellow missionaries whom had been through the same experiences, helped me to see that I was not alone, To be informed that the re-adjustment process does take at least two years was a great source of comfort. I began to count my blessings and meditate on what God had given me, not what He had taken away. His Word began to become more precious to me. Receiving professional advice gave me added reassurance that I really was normal after all!

After 18 months I am feeling much more settled and ready for the work that the Lord has led me into. In conclusion, through all these experiences and mixed emotions, I have accepted the fact that Africa will ALWAYS be a part of my life. What a privilege God has given me, to spend half my life in an African country. But with the privilege comes responsibility. A constant challenge is the question - 'What is my reaction to this privilege?'

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Excerpts from 'Caring for your Missionary' seminar, presented by WEC March 16th 2006, with permission.

Excerpts from 'A Strategic Partnership' compiled by Aim International January 2006, with permission.

FURTHER SUGGESTED READING

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