



MentorNet #60

MISSIONARY RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES IN CHANGING TIMES

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The role of Western missionaries in church planting and disciple making is changing because of fewer volunteers, legal restrictions, reduced funding and a shift to short-term mission. While some missionaries are becoming more fruitful, others show symptoms of despondence as sending churches lose their missionary vision. Great missionary work is yet to be done, but it may not be done in the same ways it was done before. Here are a few recommended points of counsel with which mentors should be able to help churches, missionaries and candidates think, pray and plan.

Keep mission a priority. Combat waning ardour for mission in the West by strongly affirming God's purposes. All through Scripture, the Creator has been inviting peoples, families and individuals to repent and receive new life. Thus missionary work is part of God's mission. This is more urgent now than ever because pressing social needs, cultural trends and rationalistic theology have steered many churches away from serious involvement in mission.

Combat apathy due to rising costs.

Promise God's power to do mission. God gives his Spirit, opens opportunities and provides material means to those who determine to extend His kingdom into neglected peoples. This is crucial now because in the West mission budgets are declining and churches perceive mission as wastefully expensive. Meeting the costs of maintaining church programs, clerical salaries and expansive building programs have reduced the funds available for supporting missionaries. Also, some missionary societies require candidates to raise huge amounts of support, even if the candidates have never proved their ability to do mission work.

Find support creatively. Options include bi-vocational workers, missionary business folk, supported two-year terms, self-supported volunteers, retired folk and emigration. A current trend is to mobilize more "tentmakers." Workers with a vocation that authorities permit can reside in fields otherwise closed to missionaries. This is more crucial now than ever, because for some workers, money has become more prominent than proven methods. Often Western missionaries prefer to support high-budget projects with lofty goals, rather see churches multiply, which requires less pleasant work.

Have churches send missionaries. In the New Testament, churches sent missionaries. In later centuries, missionary societies were launched to help churches. Good agencies do not replace churches as senders, but rather help them with cultural matters and logistics.

Assert God's mission over "missions." Your church will grow in strength, maturity and numbers as it seeks to participate in God's mission to the nations, with or without missionary societies. Many societies focus on *reached* fields and have an institutional mentality. They send workers to countries and peoples where they are not needed, and support schools where graduates do very little evangelism, church planting and mission.

Uphold a biblical model. Send proven workers in small, temporary teams.

Only send missionaries who have shown proof of their abilities, and allow them to reform their teams as often as their work requires. Let's face it: some missionaries have not won believers and started churches, yet they seem to enjoy living overseas at home churches' expense, and often form an elite caste, living several social levels above the receptive segments of society. This opposes the apostolic model and seldom produces lasting fruit.

Send missionaries who are able to travel, following the gospel into receptive regions. Some Western workers become immobile trying to make life comfortable for their families.

Keep disciple making first. Jesus said that his mission is one of making disciples who lovingly obey his commandments. Every mission effort must be evaluated by its disciple-making outcome.

Multiply workers and churches. Effective missionary work helps believers, churches and their leaders to reproduce, by training them to employ methods that others can afford to imitate.

Make these recommendations to missionary candidates:

Confirm your apostolic gift. Do not seek to be sent to do mission work until you have made disciples at home, formed them into new churches or cells, and raised up leaders among them.

Hone your skills. Learn on the job in your home church and city, so that you will have the required skills when you go to another place, people and culture.

Affirm your role. Let your apostolic gifting and call be evident to those whom you expect to send you by laying hands on you, supporting you, interceding for you and welcoming you back.

Lay concrete plans and keep updating them. Lay out a plan to complete the task within a few years. Review your plans at least annually and change them to fit opportunities. Report on progress regularly to those who send you.

Make these recommendations to sending churches:

Seek evidence of God's call. Provide opportunities for potential mission workers to do local mission work with your counsel, training and public approval, observing outcomes.

Provide on-the-job mentoring. Most gifted apostolic workers will respond positively to mentoring that empowers them, trains them, affirms them and makes their work fruitful.

Agree on purposes, goals and methods. Expect reports and provide guidance. If you send through a mission agency, then secure its agreement on the work your missionaries are to do.

Evaluate outcomes and lay new plans. Jesus ordered his followers to make disciples. Every activity and budget item should be evaluated by how it contributes making new disciples.

Make these recommendations to receiving churches:

Ask for gifted, skilled missionaries. Hosting workers from other countries may help your ministry win and teach new disciples. If current ones cannot do so, then ask for those that can.

Assign missionaries to empower your workers. The most valuable missionaries are those who have godly passion, gifts, skills and a plan to train local workers to become successful.

Beware of the money trap. You and your churches never have enough money, and you could be tempted by some foreigners to adopt costly programs that do not succeed very well.

Inform missionaries when their work is done. Find a gracious manner in which to let missionaries know that it is time for them to go home, before they become more a hindrance than a help.

Recommended Resources

P. O'Connor, *Reproducible Pastoral Training*, <www.MissionBooks.com>.

Free CP training software "Come, Let Us Disciple the Nations" from <www.Paul-Timothy.net/dn/>.

Free mentoring tools and materials for new leaders from <www.MentorAndMultiply.com>.

Train & Multiply® church planting and pastoral training course from <www.TrainAndMultiply.com>.

Order *Church Multiplication Guide* from a bookshop or at <www.WCLbooks.com>.

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