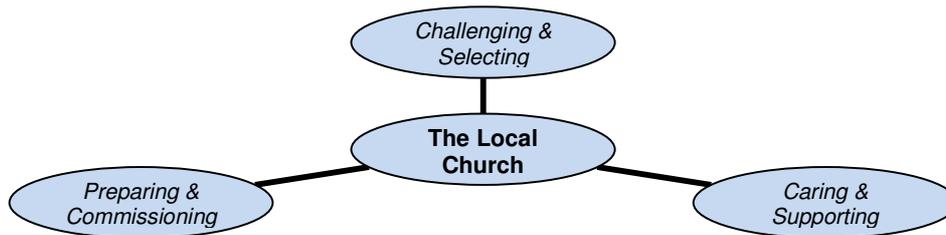


WORLD FOCUS TEAM

Assisting Local Churches and Christians in World Mission



Resource Paper 11

Guidelines for Missionary Candidates in Developing a Prayer Support team

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus". Philipians 1 v 3-6.

Missionary candidates going overseas under the auspices of a Mission Agency will receive assistance from that agency in developing an adequate support team and will be required to follow the agency's communication and security guidelines as they share experiences with their support team. The following guidelines give a general overview for those with an agency but will be especially relevant to missionaries serving independently.

Partnership involves prayer, encouragement, accountability and giving.

Missionaries must look to God to provide partners. A programme of personal partnership development is the means by which they seek to involve friends in the ministry to which they are called. They should make their ministry known to as many people as possible inviting those they meet to consider joining their team, while trusting God to speak to those whom He wants to be on their team.

The development of a partnership team also confirms the calling of those who seek to serve the Lord in cross-cultural mission, i.e. they must have a supporting church, a body of prayer partners and adequate financial support promised before entering assignment.

In developing a support team there is a tendency to think of support primarily in terms of finance; this is a mistake. The focus needs to be on building a prayer team to stand with the missionary for the long term. Knowing that people are praying will make a great difference to your time abroad, especially when you face setbacks or difficulties.

Remember the promise in Ps 121: "I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth".

Means of developing a partnership team:

1. Writing Prayer letters.

❖ *What should I say in a prayer letter?*

During your preparation and training period you will need to explain something about your Mission Agency, if applicable, outline your training programme and proposed assignment, and suggest some specific prayer topics. The better people understand your assignment the easier they will find it to pray intelligently for you. You might like to include a general brochure from your Mission Agency along with your letter.

If you are tackling this task for the first time, or could do with some pointers, the following might help:

- You are aiming to inform, inspire and involve your supporters. When they have read your letter they should be motivated to take time to pray for you. Think about what you can include that will achieve these aims.
- Concentrate on the positive and avoid overtly negative remarks about your host country (even if you feel that life there has negative aspects!). At the same time you will need to be honest about things you struggle with. It can be difficult to find the right balance! Ask yourself whether you would be happy for a national colleague to read what you have written about their country and culture.
- Tell stories about people, especially people whose lives have been changed by the Gospel.
- Once you've finished, try to step back and be objective. Ask yourself "If this landed on my doormat, would I want to read it? If not, why not?" Or ask a friend for his or her view.

❖ *What should it look like?*

There are certain things which should be included:

- the address of your Mission Agency, if applicable.
- your personal mailing address, either in UK or abroad.
- the date (month and year should be enough).
- your name printed (some signatures are not completely legible!).
- the name and address of your prayer letter distributor, if you have one, with instructions to send to this person any changes of address so that your mailing list can be kept up to date.

Other general hints:

- Give your letters a title, and maybe also a distinctive letterhead.
- Use a clear typeface .
- If you have access to a scanner, you could include a couple of photos, but choose carefully since you may lose quality if your letter is photocopied.
- Don't overfill your page. Leave clear margins, and space between columns. If at first glance it looks like hard work to read, busy people often won't bother!

❖ *How much should I say about finances?*

Letters should emphasise prayer support rather than finance. However you could raise the subject of your financial needs in general terms. It all depends who you are writing to, and how much they expect you to tell them. Maybe you will need different versions of your first letter for different people! If in doubt, you might like to say simply that all members of your Mission Agency are responsible for raising their own financial support.

You could maybe include a reply slip with your early letters, with boxes for people to tick (e.g. staying on your mailing list, receiving further information about supporting you financially etc). Those who tick the finance box could then be given more detailed information and figures, together with some ideas about how they might contribute (e.g. by tax efficient giving, standing order etc).

❖ *Can I just go ahead and send it out?*

If applicable, check your Mission Agency's publicity guidelines and comply with their approval requirements.

❖ *In summary, your letter should...*

- **inform** - people supporting you deserve and want reports. Tell them what you are doing, what you need. They want information, not sermons.
- **inspire** - your testimonies will cause others to praise God. You can encourage others to follow the Lord and may be part of the Lord speaking to them.
- **involve** - your letters can help others become interested and involved in your ministry. If your prayer letter doesn't involve some people in prayer, some people possibly in service and some people in financial support it isn't working.
- **be easy to understand** - free from 'in house' jargon, abbreviations etc. and with short sentences and paragraphs.
- **tell a story** – be topical, use pictures
- **be personal** – talk about people not concepts, organisations.
- **be regular** – three per year minimum, more in early stages.
- **give answers to prayer** – really important!

2. Other Opportunities:

- You may be invited to speak (or be interviewed) in church services and/or Home Groups, children's clubs, prayer meetings, youth groups, CUs etc. If you are responsible for filling a time slot, think about it creatively. How much do your audience already know about the ministry you are to be a part of? What are the key messages you need to communicate? What style will fit this audience best? What visuals could you use?
- One good approach is to have a number of "modules" based around a theme, since this will introduce variety and hold your audience's attention. A "module" can be an activity, a quiz, a video clip, or a story.
- Just occasionally you may find that a local reporter or radio station shows interest in what you are doing and wants to write up an article or organise an interview. Sometimes this will be fine, and they will handle information accurately and responsibly. However, this is not always the case! If you are going to a sensitive country, it's probably better to avoid media publicity completely.
- It is becoming more common for individuals to have their own web pages on the Internet. If you are heading for a sensitive country it may not be such a good idea!

3. Practical support needs that others can meet.

Some of your friends and family might ask if there is anything practical they can do to help you. Such offers are to be encouraged. People might like to take on some of the jobs below:

- You will appreciate regular contact with friends at home - are there people who would be prepared to write to you once a month? Could they send you sermon tapes, the church magazine or cuttings from the local newspaper? Small packages can also be good morale boosters, but do check up on customs regulations and the reliability of the postal service!
- You will almost certainly have access to e-mail, and should be able to set up your own address, so take a note of your friends' e-mail addresses and encourage them to keep in contact. Communicate regularly - and honestly - with your supporters by e-mail, but be aware of any security issues avoiding comments which could be offensive e.g. to national officials or colleagues.
- Copying and distributing your prayer letter yourself is generally hard work, and can be expensive. Most people prefer to find someone who will take on this role from the UK. A friend with good computer skills would be particularly welcome! In order to prevent misunderstandings check whether they will send you a bill for photocopies and stamps or do this for free.
- Find a "link person" in your church who will keep your church up to date with your news and prayer requests, add news and photos to notice boards, encourage others to write to you etc. In addition, you might like to have a link person at university, if applicable.

4. Potential resources available:

- *Friend Raising* by Betty Barnett: Published by YWAM, 1991.
- *The Donor Management Program for Missionaries* - a Windows based program that provides information management tools designed to help missionaries keep track of information about, and strengthen their

relationships with, ministry partners. The programme is made available free to those in the missionary community and may be downloaded at www.donormanager.com

- A wide range of Videos / DVDs available from most Missionary Societies for loan or purchase.

Pray that your ministry to your partners may be a blessing.

Note: Information provided by Wycliffe Bible Translators has been instrumental in developing these guidelines.