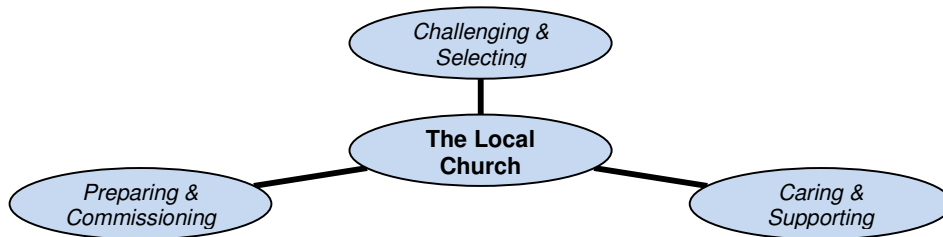


WORLD FOCUS TEAM

Assisting Local Churches and Christians in World Mission



Resource Paper 12

Good Practice for Pastoral Visits by Church Leaders to Missionaries

Pastoral visits by church leaders to missionaries during their overseas service are recommended from a number of points of view and benefit both the missionary and the church.

Where the missionary is serving under the auspices of a Mission Agency the agency should be informed at an early stage of planning and they may be able to offer helpful background on the country concerned, the cultural context of the missionary's work, appropriate medical preparations, guidance on visa requirements and general guidelines on some points of focus for such a visit.

The Mission and the missionary will be able to assist in agreeing suitable dates for the visit depending on commitments and the incidence of other events taking place around the time of the proposed visit.

The purposes to be served by such visits will include the following:

- ❖ ***Encouragement for the missionary who, inevitably, does not experience the full fellowship that is the norm for church members who regularly attend the church in the home country***

The situation of missionaries varies considerably from total isolation from other expatriate personnel to being part of a good-sized community of expatriates. In the former case, the missionary will miss keenly fellowship with other expatriate believers. The amount of fellowship with national believers will also vary, as will access to ministry of the Word in English. In any event, sharing around the Word and in prayer will be a real encouragement. Similarly, sharing first-hand information about the home church's ministry, challenges and joys and news of church friends at home will be a blessing

Enquiry should also be made as to the availability of ministry tapes etc and regular provision of these facilitated.

- ❖ ***A demonstration to the missionary that the church has a vital interest in his ministry and is concerned for his/her welfare***

This is an opportunity for the church leader to gain a real insight into the missionary's life and ministry at a depth not possible by any other means. During the visit time must be set aside to explore this thoroughly

The leader should share with the missionary the ways in which the church fellowship is informed about his/her

work and the arrangements in place for on-going prayer support

Enquiry should be made as to any additional ways in which the church can give support.

❖ ***An opportunity to provide a listening ear to the missionary's challenges and joys***

There will be joys to share and, given the stresses of cross-cultural living and ministry, challenges being faced by the missionary. It is important for the leader to provide a therapeutic listening ear

In some situations the leader may not be able to provide solutions to problems, in others he may be able to offer wise counsel. In many cases he can bring to bear a scriptural perspective and in all cases he can listen, understand and pray for the Lord's wisdom and discernment in addressing such challenges.

❖ ***An opportunity for the church leader to discern the spiritual, emotional and physical health of the missionary and to apply scriptural principles to address any issues that are apparent***

The importance of this aspect cannot be over emphasized. This should not be addressed by way of aggressive questioning but, rather, by discernment in listening 'between the lines' and by perceptive questions at appropriate points in the discussions

The matter of the missionary being diligent in taking appropriate breaks from stressful situations and seeking medical help as needed should be discussed and coping strategies developed. If deemed necessary, some accountability relationship should be established for on-going support in this area

It is helpful to be aware that a study of mission attrition by the World Evangelical Alliance Missions Commission revealed that reasons for missionaries leaving 'the field' include lack of commitment; lack of certainty over their sense of call; personal concerns including children's issues and health problems; change of assignment; lack of home support; problems with peers; and disagreement with the agency

Should it become apparent that the missionary is involved in a conflict situation s/he should be helped to understand the importance of dealing with this according to the principles provided in the Scriptures. Guideposts here include adopting a godly attitude; beginning with oneself; confronting gently and constructively; dealing with all the differences; forgiving as God forgave us and entrusting the end-results to God

Due recognition must be given to confidentiality in the discussions. When matters should be shared with others, such as the mission agency, this should be done with the agreement of the missionary. The church leader should recognise when there is need to refer some situations on for professional help.

❖ ***An opportunity for the church to understand the ministry of the missionary and the cultural context of the work***

All aspects of the ministry can be discussed in a way not possible by remote communication. As far as is possible the church leader should gain some exposure to the prevailing culture and its implications for the missionary's ministry. He should understand the basic do's and don'ts in that culture and be aware of his limitations in such a cross-cultural situation.

❖ ***Facilitation of ongoing support by the church and informed prayer for the missionary and his/her ministry***

This is really important and, on return to the home country, the leader should de-brief with the rest of the church leadership and with the church members. If not already in place, communication channels should be established to ensure an ongoing two-way flow of information and prayer requests between the member and the church

If not already in place, an appropriate prayer network should be established within the church for ongoing support of the missionary and his/her ministry.

- ❖ ***At a practical level visits facilitate the hand-carrying of personal gifts from family and items needed but not available in the ministry country***

With adequate prior communication and planning this can be a practical demonstration of the church's interest in the missionary's welfare.