



## Churches Wishing to Facilitate an Adoption Program

The primary focus of a good Adopt A Missionary Program is to encourage individual ownership and coordinated support of missionaries the church sponsors to advance the kingdom of God overseas. Often churches support a large number of missionaries but individuals in the church have little relationship with them; the church staff and a few volunteers bear the burden of most of the work in supporting their missionaries. Often churches have so many missionaries they cannot effectively support them all—there is no relationship or the church's support ends up being a little more than just putting a check in the mail once a month. Introducing an Adopt A Missionary program pushes the task of much of the support of missionaries down to the individual and team level. Consequently, the number of people directly involved in supporting your missionaries is increased.



Maybe your church is small or can't afford a missions program. The Adopt A Missionary program, if done correctly, can help your church become more involved in missions with out much impact on the church's bottom line.

### Results of an Effective Adopt A Missionary Program:

- Personal relationships with active sponsored missionaries
- Strengthened commitment to missions
- Heighten awareness of mission opportunities
- Fresh ministry perspective due to outward focus
- Group building/bonding through the service of others
- Opportunity to see God at work in a world far different than our own

## Pray

Prayer is your missionaries' number one need. Ephesians 6:18 exhorts us to, "Always keep on praying for all the saints." The primary job of the local church is to ensure people are praying—your church should pray corporately for your missionaries. Below are some suggestions to help your congregation pray more effectively or you can use the OMF prayer suggestions found in the *Introduction*.

- Forward your missionary's updates out to your whole church staff and those who want the updates.
  - Hold your missionaries accountable; ensure they are sending updates and prayer requests out.
- Ensure there is an ample supply of CURRENT prayer cards available to your church members.
- Create a location where missionary updates can be found. A place where current newsletters, e-mails, pictures, and other current items and information are posted.

- Set time aside in your services to share prayer requests for your missionaries, maybe put an insert in the bulletin.
- Follow up with small groups and teams to encourage them to pray regularly.

## Encourage and Communicate

Remember, only about 50% of all long term missionaries complete their first term of commitment. Consequently, communication and encouragement is vital.

Staff and church members responsible for missionary care, almost need to be the encouragement police; they need to monitor communication from the missionary and from the body. They need to ensure that the missionary is receiving the care they need. Whether it is something as simple as ensuring e-mail communication and updates are occurring to ensuring a place is prepared for your missionaries when they return and they are going to be welcomed.

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- Consider having a "commissioning ceremony," make a big deal about sending off your missionaries. This "officially" lets the church body know that you are behind them. This provides a tremendous amount of moral support and encouragement.
- Communication is so important.
  - Regularly encourage people in your church to communicate with their missionaries.
  - Tell your missionaries when the church mentions and prays for them.
  - If any communication goes out to the church about your missionary, ensure your missionaries also get a copy.
  - Some missionaries are awful at communication. Hold the missionaries your church sponsors accountable. Remind them that two way communication is paramount in encouraging others to pray for them and to maintain regular financial support.
- Organize a trip to visit your missionary. Try to get someone from the church to visit them at least every other year.
- **IMPORTANT:** One of the biggest things a church can do for a missionary is to give them the opportunity to report what God has been doing in their ministry. Give your missionaries some time in a service for them to share. It helps them feel like the work they are doing for the Lord is noticed, appreciated and important. It also lets the church body know about the investment they have made. At the end of Paul's missionary journey it was a common practice for him to report to the entire church all that the Lord had done. (Acts 14:27, 15:4, and 21:19)

## Material Support

Educating your local church body about the material needs of your missionaries is essential. Unfortunately, most churches are very passive in this area. Missionaries, and potential missionaries, often feel like they have been left out on a limb to fend for themselves, especially when even a little help from the pulpit would go such a long way. Encouraging people to become laborers for the harvest (*Mt 9:37*) but not providing a means to get there is like evangelism without discipleship.

Once we had a church of about 200 people faithfully give our family \$1000/month just because the pastor stood up and challenged the body to adopt us and take some ownership. Think about how much financial support even a small church could raise to help a missionary. Just twenty families at \$25/mo would mean \$500/mo for an adopted missionary.

On the other hand, many churches might be in a situation where it is not fiscally responsible to support a missionary financially or put them up for adoption to the body. This is o.k.—adoption is not about finances it is about a relationship. If your church is in this situation, you might still offer to support this missionary in prayer and encouragement. This also gives your church the opportunity to "test drive" the missionary.

Later when your church is in a position to financially support a missionary you potentially already know the character of a possible candidate to support. Often I have had churches even refuse to talk to us just because they can't support us financially. There are times where churches are supporting too many missionaries, but if this is not the case, adopt a missionary without any financial commitment anyway. You will all be blessed.

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- Consider not financially supporting missionaries at all at the church level on a monthly basis. I say this because often people assume since the church is doing something they don't have to do anything—they abdicate their ownership. Instead, encourage individuals in the body to provide monthly support for a missionary on top of their regular tithes.
- However, the church is better able to provide for one time events than a team or an individual such as:
  - Furlough:
    - Print up a new set of prayer cards for them. If needed set up an appointment with a professional photographer.
    - Car(s): In our commuter world cars on furlough are essential. Having transportation available for missionaries on furlough or even putting the word out to the body is a HUGE blessing.
    - Housing: Many churches have "missions houses." Do what you can to provide accommodations while your missionaries are on furlough.
    - School: Most missionary kids (MK's) have lived lives completely sheltered from our US culture...especially teenagers. Consider helping with Christian school tuition. This will help them settle back into this culture and be a blessing to the school to have MK's on campus.
    - Travel: Depending on the size of the family and the distance traveled, round trip tickets for a family to can cost up to \$7,000-\$10,000.
    - Put the word out to professionals in your church who might be able to provide services for free to missionaries. Often they would love the opportunity to bless them. (Options include: Doctors, dentists, photographer, lawyers (wills/power of attorney), computer and website help, mechanics, and tutors.)
  - On the Field:
    - Medical Crisis/Accident: Missionaries rarely have any reserves, living from month to month on faith. Helping out during a crisis can be a HUGE encouragement.
    - Often cars can cost 50% more than they do in the US. Most missionaries drive cars 7-10 years old or older. Helping them get into a good vehicle would be a HUGE blessing.
    - Is there a way the church could be involved in the ministry? Send Bibles, reference materials, help with a building project or purchase of equipment. Just asking would be a huge encouragement.
- Remind the body that often support will drop off on furlough, but because the cost of living is higher in the U.S. missionaries can actually struggle financially worse while back here.
- Annually let the body know that just as inflation goes up in the US it does overseas. Those who adopt should consider increasing their monthly giving when God has blessed them with a regular increase.
- Many missionary families with large mission organizations have to raise between \$6,000 and \$9,000 depending on the size of their family and where they live. Find out their needs and see what the church could do to help raise these funds through the Adopt A Missionary Program. For many, furlough is just one long fund raising campaign instead of much needed rest—help your adopted missionaries rest while they are back "home."

## Support Team

It is should the policy of your church for all your missionaries to have a support team in place prior to departure. As Neal Pirolo suggests in his book *Serving as Senders*, the following items need to be covered by individuals from the home church.

- Identifying the cross-cultural workers in your fellowship.
- Maintaining accountability in ministry.
- Confirming and encouraging spiritual growth (Before they go, on the field, and when they return.)
- Managing business affairs. (Money, Taxes, Health, and Death)
- Attending to personal details. (Material goods, family matters, ministry needs)
- [Re-entry](#) (*We have a separate chapter just for this subject!!*)

If this becomes your church's policy, ensure members of the church are aware of it. If any of these needs are not covered, help your missionary out by making the body aware of the need. (Example: "As you are all aware that our church requires our missionaries to have a support team, the Smith family is in need of someone to cover some of their business affairs. Please prayerfully consider meeting this need.)

Other ideas:

- Facilitate and encourage the meetings of those who have adopted the same missionary. Know who the team leader is and provide support and encouragement as needed. If there is not a team leader, try to find one.
- Encourage teams to remember and celebrate key dates, such as Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, etc...
  - Don't forget travel time for gifts such as Christmas; sometimes it can take up to six months for a package to arrive. Better to be early vs. late.
- Ask support teams how you can make them more effective. Remind them that you are there for them.



## Be an Advocate

- Encourage every individual, family, or small group in your local church to adopt at least one missionary that your church sponsors.
- Remind those who have Adopted A Missionary to join a team that supports their missionary and get involved.
- Create a website/webpages that facilitates individuals to Adopt Missionaries. McLean Bible Church has done a good job of this. Check out our website for the link.