



# TENDING THE FLOCK

Why Member Care  
Matters for Missionaries



# Introduction



## The Heart of the Shepherd

Churches often send missionaries into the world with great celebration, but what happens after the commissioning service? This eBook is an invitation for churches to consider their long-term role in the lives of those they send. Missionaries are valuable members of your church, even when they are away.

**They need care, connection, and community that reflects the heart of Christ. Member care is not optional; it's a reflection of the Gospel.**





# PART 1

The Shepherd and His Sheep  
*A Look at John 10:7-15*



## 1.1 God's Heart for His Sheep

In John 10, Jesus describes Himself as the “Good Shepherd,” not a distant overseer but a tender, attentive guide. He calls His sheep by name, knows them intimately, and lays down His life for them. This image helps us understand how deeply God values His people, especially those He sends out.



*Church Application:* If missionaries are sent on behalf of the Church and in obedience to the Shepherd, then caring for them isn't optional: it's imitating Jesus. The Church must reflect the Shepherd's posture, not the hired hand's detachment.

## 1.2 The Threats to the Flock

The Thief represents spiritual attack, destruction, and chaos. Missionaries often face intense spiritual warfare that is unseen to those at home.

The Hired Hand represents detachment and abandonment. He runs when danger comes, because he doesn't truly care.



*Church Application:* Missionaries are vulnerable to harm, not just physical, but emotional, relational, and spiritual. They need a sending church that won't run when things get hard but will walk with them through every season.




# PART 2

Why Missionaries  
Need Member Care

## 2.1 Unrealistic Expectations


Missionaries are often placed on pedestals. They are expected to be joyful, fruitful, and spiritually strong at all times. Churches may project expectations of perfection, and missionaries often internalize those pressures. This can result in shame, hiding, and burnout.



*Church Application:* Care begins by treating missionaries as real people with real needs, and not as spiritual superheroes.

## 2.2 Isolation and Misunderstanding


Missionaries frequently live in cultural, spiritual, and relational isolation. It's difficult to find people who truly understand their world.



*Church Application:* Regular check-ins, listening ears, and honest conversations can go a long way toward reducing that isolation.

## 2.3 Cultural Stress and Instability


Missionaries are constantly adapting to new languages, cultural values, and living conditions. Even something simple like grocery shopping can become emotionally draining. Combine that with common issues like unstable support and visa problems, and you have a recipe for weariness.



*Church Application:* Knowing the daily pressures that missionaries face can fuel more intentional prayer and support.

## 2.4 A Wise Investment

Churches often speak about “sending” missionaries as an investment in the Kingdom. But any wise investment needs regular care, attention, and reinforcement.



*Church Application:* Your missionaries are not a one-time gift. They're a long-term partnership. Healthy missionaries lead to lasting fruitfulness.



# PART 3

Common Struggles &  
Themes in the Missionary Life



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**Loneliness & Discouragement:** Missionaries are often far from family and Christian community

**Financial Struggles:** Irregular giving, emergency expenses, and high costs overseas can all be a regular part of a missionary's story

**Missing Life Events:** Weddings, funerals, holidays; missionaries watch these special events from afar

**Marriage & Family Strain:** Cross-cultural pressure can intensify relational dynamics

**Grief Accumulation:** Losses stack up over time, often unprocessed, and saying goodbye becomes a way of life

**Conflict:** Team tension, organizational differences, or interpersonal breakdowns can be intensified when they happen in a cross-cultural context

**Transition:** Missionaries often face constant change in areas like language, homes, schools, teams, not to mention the fact that coming “home” can feel disorienting and lonely

**Cultural Stress:** Feeling out of place, misunderstood, or inadequate in the place where they serve is all a normal part of a missionary’s life



**Church Application:** The church should be a soft landing place when missionaries open up about these realities, not a place of judgment or quick fixes. Be a safe space for missionaries who are processing these themes. Ask good questions and listen well.






# PART 4

Types of Member Care




## 4.1 Pre-Field Care

Think of this as premarital counseling, but for missions. It involves evaluating readiness, spiritual maturity, and relational health before someone goes.

 *Church Application:* Partner with mission organizations to walk with missionaries even before they launch. Ask, “Are we sending them well?”

## 4.2 Preventative Care


Regular rhythms of spiritual direction, mentorship, and emotional check-ins can prevent crisis down the road.

 *Church Application:* Be proactive. Don’t wait for missionaries to hit burnout before offering care.




### 4.3 Restorative Care

This is care in crisis. It involves things like counseling, debriefing after traumatic events, and even temporary withdrawal from the field for recovery.

 *Church Application:* Make space for missionaries to come home temporarily for healing, without shame or pressure to perform.

### 4.4 Ongoing Care

The most sustainable care is consistent, low-key, and relational. It's the friendly email, the prayer text, the financial gift "just because."

 *Church Application:* Make missionary care a regular rhythm, not just a special event.





# PART 5

The Church's Role - TRAVEL



## TRAVEL

This acronym helps churches remember how to walk with missionaries for the long haul:

### T – Treat Them Generously

Support them financially and relationally without guilt or pressure. They are worthy of investment.

### R – Read and Respond to Their Updates

Don't just skim their newsletters. Respond. Ask follow-up questions. Let them know that you're listening.

### A – Anticipate Needs / Ask

Don't assume that you know what they need, but don't ignore the topic either. Ask simple questions like, "What would be helpful right now?"

### V – Visit (But with Sensitivity)

Visits from home can be life-giving, but only if done well. Make it about their needs, not your experience.

### E – Encourage

Text. Call. Write. Celebrate. Remind them that they are not forgotten. Encouragement is a spiritual gift.

### L – Love Them Well

Loving well means standing by them during hardship and success, even when they step off the field, change direction, or face failure.

# CONCLUSION

Member care is not the responsibility of a select few. It is the privilege of the whole Church. When we care for those we send, we reflect the very heart of Jesus. May we be known not just for our sending power, but for our shepherding presence.



To learn more about how TEAM can help you shepherd your missionaries well, just reach out to us today at [membercare@team.org](mailto:membercare@team.org).