

**LOCAL CHURCH SUPPORT OF PEOPLE GOING FROM
THE NATIONS TO THE NATIONS
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Introduction

- Gulf War – 20 support personnel to keep one soldier fighting on the battlefield.
- Gives some indication of the vital importance of the support task!
- Engaged in a spiritual battle – extend the kingdom of God to every people group in the earth.
- The support of those working cross-culturally is just as vital!
- Support is not a Biblical word – but PARTNERSHIP is.
“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.” (Philippians 1 v 3-5)
- Paul saw their love, prayers and frequent financial contributions as an essential contribution to the advance of the gospel across the world.

The point I am trying to make is support is an indispensable element rather than an optional extra to the advance of the gospel.” If this is the case, then SUPPORT:

- (i) Should be the concern of the whole church – not just the leaders, a few “keenies” or friends of those going to another culture.
- (ii) Approached with a due sense of care, commitment and responsibility – giving it both time and resources.
- (iii) As with any other area of church life it requires good leadership. (N.B. Senior Leadership)

Question: How do we go about sending and supporting people working overseas in another culture? Let me try to answer that firstly by underscoring three key issues that are particularly relevant in cultivating a supportive climate for cross-cultural workers.

(1) Maintain an atmosphere of mission.

- Support will die or become ineffective if people do not live in an atmosphere of world mission.
“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and to bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles; that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49 v 6)
- Important to keep the big picture before your people:
 - Sunday congregational teaching.
 - Regular prophetic input – inspires & imparts.
 - Global information – highlighting prayer points.
 - Hosting overseas visitors.

(2) Maintain the focus on the individual(s).

- Public sending - accompanied by prayer and prophecy.(E.g. 1 Timothy 1 v 18 – “fight the good fight”)
- Public receiving back – celebrating time away – value of what has been accomplished.(N.B. multiple settings to share their story!)
- Keeping up to date news before the church. (Prayer)
 - Prayer Letters – appropriate, relevant and understandable. (N.B. email; mobile phone; PP)
 - Live link up during the service!
- Profile on new members course. (N.B. Vice versa)

(3) Maintain good pastoral care.

Level of pastoral care will vary according to circumstances:

- Received into local church in another culture – primary responsibility of those local elders.
- Pioneering situation – no local church – greater level of pastoral support and input.

Must be clear on how we will communicate with them (or the local elders) to assess their spiritual condition:

- Letter, telephone or email or by personal visits?
- Frequency of contact – experience shows it needs to be planned into the diary rather than ad hoc!

Forethought needs to be given:

- How often are they to be brought home – rest, attend conferences or receive further training?
- What action needs to be taken if adverse circumstances arise such as – illness, death of a relative, overthrow of government or life threatening persecution?

As a first suggestion at an answer we need to cultivate and maintain the right climate for support.

Other questions:

- What about the practicalities?
- In what ways can we support people on their journey to their cross-cultural task?
- How can we support them once they are working cross-culturally overseas?

I have tried to suggest some practical answers to those very questions in my short booklet: “Reaching the Nations” (Recommendations for local church leaders). So let me give you some headlines

(a) Profiling the personnel

- **Suitability for cross-cultural work** (a complex issue!)
(E.g. ability versus availability; weakness versus strength; maturity versus immaturity)
- **Character development (often a neglected area!)**
(E.g. dependable; teachable; considerate; generous; etc.)
- **Relational skills**
(E.g. wide range of people; attitude to authority; tolerance; handling conflict; empathy; self-giving; etc.,)
- **Family issues**
(E.g. united in call; time of life; extended family; children’s special needs; etc.,)
- **Health issues**
(E.g. mental health; past traumas; physical handicaps)
- **Qualifications/work experience**
(E.g. need for upgrade or re-training)
- **Spiritual maturity/Christian ministry**
(E.g. theological training; pastoral ministry; specialist areas)
- **Life skills**
(E.g. everyday living; modern technology; language learning)

(b) Clarifying the call

- **Motivation**
(E.g. recognition; escape; guilt; romanticism)
- **Realism**
(E.g. themselves; the task; the cost)
- **Spiritual maturity**
(E.g. relationship with God; self-feeder; love for body of Christ)
- **Effective ministry**
(E.g. fully engaged; productive; reproducing)
- **Call of God**
(E.g. evidence of process; inner conviction; outward confirmation)
- **Local Church**

(N.B. "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and us.")

(c) Researching the route

- **Long-term versus short-term**
- **Arena of preparation and training**
 - In House
 - Theological College/Mission Agency/Denomination
 - Partnership
- **Language**

Let me give you some headlines on Sending and supporting with six practical areas of support:

- Moral
- Logistics
- Finance
- Prayer
- Communication
- Re-entry

MORAL

- Need for constant encouragement – verbal affirmation, a listening ear or continued genuine friendship.

LOGISTICS

- Providing resources to enable people to perform their particular cross-cultural ministry in an effective manner.
- Area where we have opportunity to catch up many in the church by encouraging them to use their natural gifts to serve those sent out into other nations.

FINANCE

- Agree the amount of church/personal support.
- Need for constant review and consideration given to hidden costs such as pastoral visits to workers, bringing folk back for training or strategic conferences or costs related to contingency plans.
- Supplement regular giving with one-off gifts.

PRAYER

- As well as corporate, need to supplement with small groups with a particular burden or interest.
- Can deal more easily with "confidential" matters.

COMMUNICATION

- Not simply about spiritual matters (work & ministry), nor just the welfare of the person(s).
- Every day affairs of daily living – continuing to build genuine friendships.

RE-ENTRY

- Make the transition from the host culture back into the home culture as easy and beneficial as possible.
- Practical detail of welcome, transport and hospitality.
- Debriefing the cross-cultural worker on their time in the other culture – good things can be celebrated, real hurts healed and genuine understanding be gained by all parties.
- Seek to refocus and make plans for the future.

*Presented by Mike Frisby
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