

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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Why Your Church Should Support Fewer Missionaries

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Like many families, churches are perennially trying to balance their monthly budgets and make those valuable dollars stretch in a way that best honors God. They want to make an impact in global outreach and be good stewards of God's resources.

Yet as they consider expanding their involvement in missions, the world map in the church lobby can too often become the benchmark for a successful missions ministry. They support missionaries so they can put pins in more countries or have a missionary on each continent.

Frequently, churches support 10, 20, or 30 missionaries at a small monthly amount. Missions involvement for many churches is a mile wide and an inch deep. Making a broad impact is nice, but making a deep impact would result in greater influence and glory to God.

Churches who support 30 missionaries at a low level might prayerfully consider reducing their number of supported missionaries to perhaps five or less – so that they can dive deeper into those ministries and lives.

Deeper Impact

When investing more substantively into fewer missionaries, a church and its leadership will truly

get to know their missionary partners. As the relationship grows and trust develops, a congregation can care for the needs of the missionaries it supports as it would for their own members. Missionaries are more prone to be honest and forthright with supporters they know.

Regrettably, however, the vast majority of missionaries aren't meaningfully cared for by a church family, not even their home church. Many missionaries have few people to turn to when in need. But a church deeply invested in a missionary is uniquely positioned to extend practical grace.

Churches should continue to send short-term teams and interns, if that's what the ministry needs. Additionally, church leaders should consider visiting the missionaries on their turf for a "house call" – spending time doing neglected chores in the missionary's home, babysitting their kids, helping with their grocery shopping, even counseling them. It's vital to get to know your missionaries in their environment. Walk in their shoes for a few days or weeks.

As your church continues to visit the same ministry site year after year, your members will also get to know the national partners. And by better understanding the culture and people, you will have a greater (and more knowledgeable) passion for them and their needs. Both parties will then be better positioned to view each other within a fraternal relationship rather than a

paternal one.

More than an ATM

Over time and through regular contact, a church can have a more substantive and fruitful impact on the ministry with which it partners. As you get to know the missionaries and ministries, you can be viewed more like a partner and less like an ATM. This depth benefits not only the missionary's ministry, but also the spiritual growth of your congregation. Everyone begins catching the vision for what it means to be a global Christian.

If you spend time with your missionary partners once every few years – whether during furlough or short-term trips – a substantive relationship will not be created. And without substance your missionaries will be less able and likely to open up

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to you; as a result, you will be less able and likely to foster their spiritual health. Call your missionaries on their VOIP phone. Almost every missionary has one, and it's not an international call for you. Send them an e-mail to let them know the church prayed for them today. Remember their birthdays and anniversaries with electronic gift cards. Help them fund a small vacation or new electronics.

A larger financial contribution from your church to your missionaries will ensure two important things: first, their need to find fewer supporters will mean they travel less during furlough, and, second, if they have fewer supporters, they may visit your church for a couple of weeks instead of just one Sunday every four years. Many missionaries have 20 or 30 churches and dozens of individuals supporting them. Nobody can keep in contact with that many ministry partners. Missionaries with a small number of larger financial partners, however, can invest more deeply in those strategic relationships.

Substantive and Reciprocal

When your church supports missionaries and international ministries by writing a small check once a month, neither you nor the missionaries receive a truly substantive, life-giving benefit from the relationship. On the other hand, a generous investment of time, energy, and finances will help your missionaries feel connected and increase your church's grasp of – and meaningful investment in – the Great Commission.

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To be sure, as part of this increased investment churches must insist on reciprocation. No longer can churches tolerate missionaries who don't communicate and interact with their sending partners. Missionaries should communicate and churches should demand it. There is no excuse today for not receiving regular contact from your missionaries.

What happens when substantive, reciprocal relationships are formed? The congregation, the missionaries, and the nationals all benefit. Above all else, God receives greater glory from churches and missionaries who are connected, invested, and healthy.



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