



M I C H I G A N
M I N I S T R Y
N E T W O R K

WHAT EVERY
MISSIONARY WISHES
PASTORS KNEW

Welcome,

One of my goals as Network Superintendent is to assist Pastors in practical ways. One way is to help the relationship between a Lead Pastor (church) and MMN missionaries.

Even though most pastors have a heart for missions, it can sometimes get misconstrued with the actual missionary. This is a vital relationship that must be cultivated if we are to launch into our world with purpose.

This guide is designed to help you, the pastor, to learn from our missionaries how to work together effectively. This e-book is the perspective that every missionary wishes a Lead Pastor had.

May God bless your every step,

Aaron Hlavin
AG Michigan Ministry Network
Superintendent

(edited 10-31-2023)

INTRODUCTION

Let's get started

Being a missionary is different from serving in a local church.

Missionaries are called to a culture that is different from the one they grew up in. They must leave familiar comforts, learn a new language, conform to a new government, adjust to new cultural customs, and deal with loneliness.

They miss birthdays, weddings, funerals, and family events that have long been part of their traditions. They give up the rhythm of their everyday life to go where they are called to serve.

In addition, they leave friends, church, and support systems to serve in a place where they have little to no support. They continue to maintain relationships in the United States while cultivating a life in a new culture. This often means navigating two different worldviews with varying points of view on politics, war/peace, poverty/wealth, government, human rights, family, and religion.

There are also physical and travel challenges that we simply do not face here in the United States. Many countries do not have the infrastructure, cleanliness, and security to the level the missionary is accustomed.

They also can experience personal, family, or marital problems exacerbated by the unique stresses of living in a foreign culture. Learning to adjust to new traditions and expectations can be very difficult.

Missionaries often struggle (as pastors do) with a lack of results they had envisioned when they first were called. This is extra challenging since they feel the pressure to justify what they do to people and churches who support them. Even though there is real ministry occurring, it can be challenging to explain that in a way that American culture understands.

Like those of us doing ministry in the United States, they also manage conflict, frustrations, opinions of others, time management, children's education and health issues, safety, facilities, and sickness. However, this occurs while they face the challenge of raising and maintaining financial support.

Their life is unique, and we trust this helps you gain an understanding of their work. Hope it helps you help them!

WHAT MISSIONARIES WANT PASTORS TO KNOW

15 THOUGHTS FROM MISSIONARIES TO PASTORS

As we interviewed missionaries, several common themes became clear. They are listed here.

- 1. Unless they have served as a missionary, a Lead Pastor doesn't fully understand what it is like to be a missionary.** No amount of interaction, prayer and financial support, or even short-term missions trips can give you a full picture of what it is like to be a missionary.
- 2. Missionaries are just as called as you are.** The driving force of a missionary is not raising funds, but serving people whom they are called to. They are called to a different field but are equally called by God.
- 3. Missionaries long to be in their assignment.** The heart of a missionary beats for people they may have never even met. It pains a missionary to be home on furlough or waiting to go to the field for the first time. Their bodies may be here, but their hearts and minds are usually far away. They are called to a different field but are equally called by God.
- 4. Missionaries live with incredible stress and often struggle with doubt throughout the process of raising support.** The process of itinerating, raising funds, making connections, moving to a new country, and integrating into new life increases the faith of the missionary. However, there will be significant times of stress and doubt. The process can take a long time, and they may feel like it's never going to happen. Furthermore, many missionaries feel like second-class ministers, beggars, and very much alone in the process. When a missionary calls, remember they may need a friend, just as much as they need funding.
- 5. Missionaries truly care about you and your church.** Missionaries are not just wanting to get your money. They want to partner with you and your church. Missionaries love the local church and want you to succeed as much as anybody. It is very common to see missionaries around the world celebrating the wins of the local church. We must never view that as "protecting their support," but rather as a genuine Christlike passion for His bride.
- 6. Your church made a commitment.** Sometimes a church decides to shift their missions focus. This often occurs when a new pastor begins leading the church. This shift in focus often results in discontinued existing support for missionaries.

These changes affect the missionaries. AGWM missionaries are not supposed to raise monthly support while on the field. They may indicate how to give in newsletters and communications, but they are not supposed to be contacting pastors individually asking for monthly support. If a missionary loses too much in monthly support, they may be required to leave the field prematurely and unexpectedly. This causes decreased productivity in overseas ministry work.

While missionaries certainly understand the need to reduce due to the inability to support financially, it is a hard pill to swallow when the church that previously made a commitment, reallocates support to another project.

7. Missionaries appreciate being notified. Missionaries really do understand when a church is no longer financially able to meet its mission's obligations. Missionaries can appreciate that unforeseen circumstances by the church can cause these things to happen, and they are typically very understanding of these decreases. Please know, missionaries truly get it, but when this is the case, please consider the following:

- Consider reducing support by a percentage instead of reducing support to zero.
- Consider discontinuing support for a three-month period and then re-evaluate.
- Give the missionary a date to check back in to see if finances have increased.
- Please contact the missionary to let them know about the change, even if it is to discontinue support. Missionaries really appreciate it.

8. Please respond. Call missionaries back. Call them back even if the information to be shared is a no. Missionaries often make many calls, send emails, and do not receive a return call. This puts the missionary in a very awkward position. If they call again, they feel like they are a nuisance. But if they do not call, they may miss the opportunity.

9. Please let a missionary know when they have not met your expectations. Sometimes a Pastor feels the need to discontinue missionary support for reasons other than lack of finances. These reasons can include perceived inappropriate behavior on the part of the missionary, ineffective ministry, or lack of communication.

In cases like this, please be compassionately honest with the missionary regarding your reasoning for cutting or considering cutting support. This allows for a learning opportunity for the missionary. Please consider giving a lump sum contribution equal to 3 to 6 months of support when communicating this decision. This gives the missionary time to adjust to the decrease in monthly support.

10. Remember their expenses. When an itinerating missionary comes to grab a coffee, meet with a missions committee, or share a window in a worship service, remember that it costs them money to do so. Having a missionary come several times takes time and resources. Make every attempt to schedule several things at one time to maximize the opportunity. If you do require several visits, consider giving a gas card or covering travel expenses.

11. Give guest (service) missionaries clear expectations. Missionaries want to meet your expectations when they are with you. Making expectations clear is essential for an effective presentation to your church. Expectations are hard to manage when they remain unspoken.

12. Tell missionaries the best way to interact with you. Tell missionaries how to connect with you. They want to connect with you in the way that is most effective and less intrusive to you and your life. One thing missionaries hear from pastors is how draining all the missionary calls are. Some have even heard pastors say: "I get more calls from missionaries than from my church members". Even though this makes a missionary feel uncomfortable, they do understand the frustration.

Develop a preferred contact process for missionaries seeking support. This should include a written process of what information a church wants, how to send it to the church, and how to follow up. This should include emails, phone numbers and address information. Include if it is better to set up an in-person meeting, phone conversation, or some other process.

If each church had a protocol that they could convey to missionaries upon their first contact that was honest and consistent, there would be less ambiguity and more effective communication.

13. If committing to financial support, fill out the pledge form. Both AGWM and US Missions require that missionaries support only get counted when a signed pledge form is received in Springfield. This helps the missionary show progress and allows the missionary to meet the goals that have been set for them. This is a huge pressure reliever for a missionary. It is ok to ask a missionary to fill out the pledge form on your behalf.

14. If the answer is a NO, just tell them NO. It is better to just be honest with a missionary than it is to keep them hanging on waiting for an answer. Missionaries would rather hear a firm no, than an ambiguous maybe. This allows a missionary to move forward in seeking support elsewhere and helps them gain respect for you. If it is a no, let them know!

15. Love the missionary's family. The missionary life calls the children of the missionary as well. The family is called too. If possible, remember to pray for and care for their family.