

# Missionary Care

## Where Does a Church Begin?

Missionaries remain part of the body of their sending church. Regardless of whether they are physically present for worship every week or are working on the other side of the globe, they are members “back home” unless something breaks the relationship. Their church, therefore, is responsible to provide care for them just like they do for other members of the community—but missionaries need it even more!

Because global workers are on the frontlines of spiritual battle, they are special targets of the enemy. It is safe to assume all missionaries have suffered some painful battle wounds. That doesn't automatically mean they are incapacitated or depressed. **But at a minimum, they need frequent**

**refreshment and renewal.** Many wrestle with personal, family, and/or ministry issues that are more complex because of the international context.

The majority of mission agencies provide at least some debriefing and counsel for their members. However, global workers also need care from their home church. Since some missionaries do not have proactive care from a sending congregation, other churches will need to consider filling the gap.

What does that care look like? Let's begin by identifying the multiple types of missionary care. We'll further unpack these categories on the next page.

## TYPES OF MISSIONARY CARE



### FRIEND CARE

Deep connections with understanding peers



### PASTORAL CARE

Shepherding provided by church leaders



### BARNABAS CARE

Confidential listening and encouragement from godly mentors



### PROFESSIONAL CARE

Counsel provided by trained therapists



### SPECIALIZED PROFESSIONAL CARE

Counsel provided by trained professionals with experience in missions context



### PROFESSIONAL RESIDENTIAL CARE

Counsel provided in a setting that includes rest and freedom from distractions

## MISSIONARY CARE EXPLAINED



### Friend Care

- Essential for every missionary/family; missions leadership can encourage (see [blog](#))
- Care givers: loving friends who will invest significant time and energy in friendship with missionaries despite distance, travel schedules, etc. These people accept changes in the missionary's perspective and lifestyle without judging.
- No cost (except travel costs if it involves field visits)



### Pastoral Care

- Essential for every missionary/family; missions leadership can make sure it is scheduled
- Care givers: pastors who will bless workers with their time to listen, pray, and care. Children and teens also need pastoral care from the appropriate person.
- No cost (except travel costs if it involves field visits)



### Barnabas Care

- Needed by most missionaries/families; missions leadership can recruit gifted encouragers
- Care givers: church members with the gifts of discernment and encouragement
- The level of care addressed in the rest of this article
- No cost except when travel involved



### Professional Care

- Needed by many missionaries/families; missions leadership can determine with missionary if a competent local counselor is a match or if they need someone who better understands the unique needs of global workers (see below)
- Care givers: trained counselors or medical professionals providing sometimes just a "tune-up," but in other cases addressing long-term, deep-seated issues
- Church underwrites cost as needed



### Specialized Professional Care

- Needed by a number of missionaries/families; missions leadership may need to initiate
- Care givers: check with agency for recommendation of counselors who specialize in working with missionaries
- Church underwrites cost as needed



### Specialized Residential Care

- Needed by more missionaries /families than initially may be evident; missions leadership may need to initiate
- Care givers: see our [Missionary Care Services issue of Postings](#) for some options
- Church will likely need to underwrite majority of cost

## Barnabas Care

This *Postings* will focus specifically on church-based Barnabas care. The one essential ingredient of this level of missionary care is “care.” Expressing genuine care will open doors for deep, renewing ministry.

### Yes, You Can Do This!

If your church is new to the concept of caring for your workers, don't feel overwhelmed and assume you are not competent. Your missionary does not expect you to have all of the answers. You do not need to be a counselor (in fact, it is important not to overstep the bounds and assume the role of professional counselor).

The Barnabas caregiver's role is to be a discerning listener. They may be a blend of encourager, mentor, coach, and sounding board. If the caregiver believes that the missionary needs professional care, they should not hesitate to recommend it to them. The caregiver may need to be a bridge to church missions leaders to set counseling in motion.

### Five Underlying Questions



**Ken Royer** of Link Care Center has given us permission to share the following list of unspoken questions your missionaries will be asking when they meet with you. The answers will determine how much your

workers will share with you and how deeply you can minister to them.

#### 1. Can I trust you?

Probably the main reason why you have been selected to “listen” is because you are perceived as someone who can be trusted. Trust communicates that you can be counted on to do what you say, you are faithful to your word and faithful to your commitment, and you maintain integrity.

At the beginning of your first conversation, affirm appropriate confidentiality—verbalize that what is shared with you will be contained right there, or you will ask the missionary's per-

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mission prior to sharing with anyone else. [The exception is legally-mandated requirements of reporting e.g. suspicion of homicide, suicide, child abuse, elder abuse—or whatever harmful situations the laws of your area require be reported].

#### 2. Will you really hear what I'm trying to tell you?

Be a good listener who is not judgmental. There is so much about cross-cultural experiences which you may not understand, and it is so easy to begin to think in terms of “right” or

“wrong.” Black-and-white responses will likely close the door for your missionary's further sharing with you.

#### 3. Are you genuinely interested?

Questions that show real interest will reassure the missionary that you care. Ask questions that help you understand what is below the surface. Make eye contact.

#### 4. Will you try to connect with how I feel?

Respond to statements you missionary makes with comments that indicate you are taking seriously the impact of what has been said. You might reply, “Wow, that must have been a painful (or happy, joyful, sad, exasperating) experience.” Or “I wonder why they might have thought that?”

#### 5. Will you invest enough time to really understand?

You may need to say, “I'd really like to hear more; may I take you to lunch tomorrow?” This leaves the door open to further helpful communication. By dedicating sufficient time (both quality and quantity), you give the missionary the gift of “caring.”



### Prayer as Renewal

One of the most important ways to provide Barnabas care is to pray with your workers. Don't just tell them you are praying for them (important too), but take the time to pray with

them. Often it is helpful to discuss together exactly what the two of you agree God wants you to ask Him for.

## Separating Care and Accountability

It is usually wise to choose a Barnabas-care giver who is not a part of the missions leadership team. The team needs to exercise accountability with the missionary in line with their God-given stewardship responsibilities. They need to ask hard questions and make tough decisions at times. Because of that, it is best to make a clear distinction between missions decision-makers and Barnabas-care givers. However, the missions team also want to be empathetic listeners and care givers.



## Barnabas Care in Action

People at my home church have journeyed closely with me ever since I was sent out. Whenever I have had something going on and needed to process it outside of my team, I would call one of these people.

At one point I felt emotionally paralyzed about making a major decision. These people rallied around me and confirmed that I needed to make a change. Across the transition, I met with them several times as a group, but more often it was interacting with individuals one on one.

They heard me out. They confirmed what my gifts were. They were very affirming but they didn't blindly rescue me either. They helped set in motion counseling to work through deeper issues (and the church covered most of the cost).

As I healed and moved forward, these people helped me discern next steps. They listened carefully as I talked about potential options and pointed out that in some cases I was positive about opportunities but not really excited about them. With their encouragement, I kept looking until I found a really good fit.

I don't know if I would be in the healthy, productive ministry I enjoy today if weren't for my sending church's proactive Barnabas care was!

*A field worker*

## Friend Care

Check out our "[Friend Care](#)" for Missionaries" blog post that suggests some ways a church can encourage the congregation to maintain friendships with their missionaries.

## Learn More

### Conferences

There are several conferences and training opportunities for non-professional, church-based care givers that bring together those committed to meeting the needs of missionaries and their families.

- [Midwest Conference on Missionary Care](#)

A one-day conference held annually in February in Minneapolis

- [Care ConneXion](#)

An annual training day held in Oregon coming up this year on Saturday, April 12

- [Pastors to Missionaries Conference](#)

An extended conference held in the East; scheduled for October 7-10, 2014

### Coaching

- [Advanced Global Coaching](#)

Offers coaching to church members who provide care for their workers

### Resources to Get Started

There are many excellent resources for those who wish to broaden their understanding of missionaries' challenges and how to minister to global workers. Here are some places to start:

- [Serving as Senders](#)

Neal Pirolo's classic book overviews the way a church can care for its workers.

- [Tender Care](#)

Seven experienced missionary care givers provide practical advice to help you encourage your missionaries.

### Going Deeper

- [Mental Health and Missions Conference](#)

An annual conference for professionals who serve missionaries

- [Building Skills for Member Care with Excellence](#)

Conference hosted by [Link Care](#), January 12-16, 2015

- [Resources Overview](#): *Brigada Today* has published an list of lists related to [missionary care](#).

- [Extensive Bibliography](#)

Kelly O'Donnell has just updated a list of 100+ resources on member care.

## Questions for Churches

1. Is your senior pastor aware of how important an hour of his personal time is to your missionaries? Could you help get an appointment with them on his calendar early during each worker's home assignment?
2. Are you regularly planning pastoral and Barnabas-care visits to workers on the field? Are these a line-item in your annual missions budget?
3. How can you identify people in your congregation who have the gift of encouragement and could serve as Barnabas-care givers? If your missionaries have advocate teams, having a Barnabas-care giver on each team is a great way to serve them.
4. How could you better prepare your Barnabas-care givers? Should you send several people to one of the conferences listed above? Are you building a small library of resources helpful to those giving such care?

## Questions for Agencies

1. Do your missionaries' sending churches understand the levels of care listed here and the importance of each? Should you share this issue of *Postings* with each church as they send out workers and when those workers come on home assignment?
2. Are sending churches aware of what kinds of care you provide missionaries? Do they understand how your missionary care and theirs are complementary?
3. Do you have a policy of how you communicate with sending churches when their workers need more in-depth counsel and care? Are sending churches and missionaries aware of these policies?
4. Do churches understand that you want to hear from them if they discover or suspect their workers are dealing with some serious issues? Do they know whom to contact?
5. Do you regularly thank churches who care for their missionaries well? Do you tell their stories as examples to other congregations?

### Interchange Postings

Catalyst's *Postings* is a monthly e-newsletter designed to help church leaders and mission agency personnel expand the global impact of the local church.

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