

# **Dealing with Missionaries on Deputation**

A Burning Heart Publication

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## After They Leave

There is still work to be done after a missionary leaves. Unfortunately this work is often left undone.

1. Make sure that all promises to the missionary are kept.
2. Make sure that the finances are handled appropriately. A meeting held at your church should not be a negative cash flow for the missionary. If a missionary has to spend \$300 in food, fuel and lodging to minister to a church, a \$50 honorarium is not exactly a blessing. A love offering that is taken and never given to the missionary is also not helpful. Put careful thought into how you handle these financial matters.
3. Let the missionary know your procedure for taking on a missionary. Every church is different. Some discuss it within the month, others at their yearly missions conference or annual business meeting. Without this information a missionary is left hanging. Tell him approximately when the matter will be discussed. When the decision is made, take the time to inform him. Often a missionary gets taken on for support, but doesn't know it until several months later when a new deposit shows up in his account. Even then he isn't always sure whether it is monthly support or a one-time gift. If you decide not to support the missionary, inform him of that as well. A missionary knows that not every church can take him on for support. An email or phone call allows him to not have to wonder.
4. Missions support is more than money. Far too often the church votes on a missionary, the treasurer begins writing checks and everyone feels like they have done their duty. Voting on a missionary should be the beginning of a close personal relationship. Communication lines should be established from that moment and continue for as you support them financially. A system should be in place that keeps the missionary from becoming just another bill that gets paid every month.

**Two key things that need to be accomplished while the missionary is with you:**

1. Spend enough time with the missionary that a reasonable decision concerning support can be made.
2. Work at developing a friendship with the missionary because if you take them on for support, it is supposed to be a partnership.

I didn't write this booklet. Missionaries did. It is a compilation of their thoughts and experiences, both in churches that made deputation a joy and in those that made a difficult job even harder. Since most pastors have never been on deputation it is not strange that many have no idea of the problems that their lack of knowledge causes. Most of the ideas are easy to implement and cost almost nothing in time or money; yet it can make a world of difference in the missionaries' experience with your church.

If you grew up in Christian circles, the word deputation is a very common word. It is so familiar that you have probably never actually thought about what it means. The word means more than just "a missionary travelling from church to church trying to raise financial support." The root word of deputation is "depute": To appoint or authorize as a representative. A more common word would be deputy: A person who is empowered to act as a substitute. The deputation process is the church authorizing a missionary to represent them in another place. The church is choosing men and women to act as their substitute. Delegating authority is a serious matter and, therefore, the deputation process should be taken very seriously.

## Scheduling Missionaries

### Be Reachable:

Many pastors do not realize that a missionary may spend up to 8 hours almost every day on the phone trying to schedule meetings. Unanswered messages on answering machines and pastor's desks leave that church on the missionaries list of "possibles." Therefore, he must continue calling over and over again until a meeting is scheduled or a definite "no" is given. Make contact with you as quick and easy as possible. Church secretaries should be fully briefed on connecting the missionary with the pastor. If the church is not scheduling missionaries or cannot support any more missionaries, the secretary could be authorized to convey that information.

(Pastoral Hint: I have found that setting aside time every Wednesday morning to deal with missions and missionaries to be a very helpful thing. The church secretary informs all missionaries who call during the week that their call will be returned on Wednesday. Their contact information is placed in a fold with all the documentation necessary. It is a very simple orderly process that doesn't disrupt my schedule throughout the week.)

### Be Honest:

A pastor's desire to not discourage or hurt a missionary's feelings may cause him to be less than open with a missionary. Although our speech should always be seasoned with kindness, what a missionary really needs is good, old-fashioned plain speaking.

- Be honest about your ability to support them.  
Missionaries know that not every church is in the financial position to take them on. However, traveling across the country just to find that out is not a help. Often a missionary would be happy to speak at a church that can't support them, but they should be aware of that ahead of time. Every meeting scheduled that has no chance of support just lengthens the deputation process.
- Be honest about your willingness to support them.  
Ministry philosophy, church philosophy, personal standards and church policy all help to determine whether a church is willing to support a specific missionary. These types of

## While They Are with You

When preparing and dealing with missionaries it is wise to remember that the needs of a single lady missionary and the needs of a family with six children will be significantly different. Plan accordingly.

### The service:

- Missionaries travel a long distance to be with you. They should not be just a small addition to your service. Give them adequate time to minister.
- Have someone assigned to help the missionary with all of the audio/visual needs. Trying to get this accomplished 2 minutes before the service can be difficult.
- Have someone assigned to help get the missionary children to Sunday school/junior church/nursery and then back to their parents. Missionaries are often caught in conversations at their table and cannot get away to find their children.
- If possible, have a question and answer time at the end of the service.

### Make a special effort to be a blessing to the missionary:

- Be sure the love offering at least covers their expenses. Either give them the offering before they leave or inform them of it.
- Mission closets can be a great help to some missionaries. It allows them to gather supplies for their travels or their ministry. However, if they are on the road for months at a time, everything you give them must be hauled all of that time. Gas cards or Wal-Mart gift cards are always a good thing.
- Encourage the missionaries' spiritual growth by giving them good books and audio CDs.
- Consider providing the missionary with a babysitter so the couple can have some quality time together. Do something fun with the children (they spend most of their life in a car or hotel room).
- Help them with services like laundry, dry cleaning and oil changes. Allow the church members to use their professional talents like computer repair, dentistry, hair cutting, and mechanics to be a blessing to the missionary.
- Be careful about food arrangements. Do not over-feed or over-fill their schedule with meal appointments.

## Before They Come

Once a missionary has been scheduled, adequate preparation should be made to make the time more profitable, the church service more effective and their stay more pleasant. With just a little forethought, this can be accomplished.

Prepare the people for the upcoming missionary. Take the time to familiarize yourself with the missionary who is coming and share those details with the church. Encourage the people to email letters of encouragement in anticipation of their arrival. Preparations like these help build a relationship and cause the time to be more profitable. Ask them about their likes/dislikes and food allergies, and prepare a gift basket for them. (Don't forget the kids!)

A few weeks before their arrival you should communicate in writing as much information about the upcoming meeting as you can. Missionaries have learned to be flexible, but failing to communicate basic information just makes life that much more difficult and the meeting that much less effective.

- Explain how you plan to use them while they are there. This should include the time of each event/service and the amount of time they should have.
- Inform the missionary of what time people will start arriving so he can have his table set up in advance.
- Explain what audio/visual equipment he can expect you to have or if he needs to bring his own.
- Give very clear driving instructions/addresses to every place needed.
- Give several different contact numbers in case of emergency. (i.e.: the church number, pastor's cell, assistant pastor, secretary)
- A picture of the pastor's family and other staff members is a great help. (Missionaries are often left trying to guess who the pastor's wife is.)

Since most of the details are the same for every missionary that is scheduled, once this information is gathered, it can be sent over and over with very little effort. However, these little details have a huge impact on the missionary's ministry at the church.

questions should be answered before scheduling a missionary. If something makes them unsupportable, kindly make them aware of it.

- Be honest in your promises.  
This should go without saying, but a pastor ought to keep his promises. Avoid the temptation to say positive things to a missionary that may not be within your power to fulfill. Better not to promise than to disappoint. Also, vague answers like "call back in 3 months" that postpone the inevitable "no" are not a blessing.
- Be honest in your reason for scheduling a missionary.  
A missionary is often scheduled, without knowing it, as pulpit supply for the pastor. A missionary presenting his ministry without the pastor present has almost no chance of support. This should not be done without his knowledge. If you are scheduling the missionary to increase your church's missionary awareness, make sure the missionary knows that all he can expect is a love offering.

### Be Encouraging:

Long hours of unanswered calls and emails tend to discourage the missionary trying to schedule meetings. Keep this in mind as you talk with them on the phone. Make sure you treat the missionary as a servant of the Lord, not a beggar. Even if there is no chance of scheduling them, be genuinely interested in their ministry and spend a few moments to try to encourage them. If possible, pray together with them on the phone. Even if financial support is not possible, kindness is.

## **Be Thoughtful/Reasonable:**

Take time to consider your scheduling policies and procedures. A little thought could be a great blessing to the missionary and help you avoid many problems.

Some thoughts to consider:

- Don't schedule so many missionaries that they feel like support is a popularity contest. This is especially true at a missions conference.
- If you schedule a missionary, make sure that the meeting gets put on the church calendar and that there are no conflicts. The missionary should have adequate time to present his ministry.
- To avoid unnecessary travel, try to schedule a missionary when he will be in your area. Be willing to be the first church scheduled in an area.
- Before you schedule more missionaries, make sure that your support level is appropriate. A balance between the number of missionaries and a reasonable support level should be maintained. If a missionary needs \$5,000 per month support, it will take 100 churches at \$50 per month. Even if every church that he visited would support him, this would be two solid years of deputation. This is not reasonable. Review your church's missionary support level on a regular basis.
- Good questions should be asked to determine the supportability of a missionary before scheduling him, but prying, long-winded survey forms make life more difficult than is necessary. Be considerate of the missionary's time.
- Deputation is a long, difficult process that can be very hard on a missionary family. School on the road is a daunting task, not to mention illness and normal family functions. Be understanding if a missionary cannot always bring his entire family.
- Consider sharing the missionary with other churches while they are in the area (especially if you have a prophet's chamber).
- Schedule missionaries as far out as possible to help them get their calendar set.

## **Accommodations:**

Every missionary who has been on deputation for any length of time has at least one "horror story" about a place where they have been housed. These stories range from dirty to dangerous. Missionaries do not expect to stay in 5-star hotels, but a clean, safe place is a reasonable expectation.

No matter where they are housed, the pastor should have firsthand knowledge of its acceptability. The pastor should not accept the offer of a home if it does not meet reasonable standards. If using a hotel or prophet's chamber, the pastor should spend at least one night per year there to verify its adequacy.

Realize that all missionaries are not the same. Singles, couples and families all have different needs. Keeping the missionaries in homes helps your church develop a heart for missions, but can be very hard on the missionary's family. Missionaries need a chance to unwind, have some family time and relax where they do not feel like they are on display. However, a single missionary (especially ladies) may not feel secure in a hotel or lonely prophet's chamber and may actually need some people time.

Try to be sensitive to the missionary's needs and desires when finding them a place to stay.

- Be aware of the missionary's need for sleep. Keeping them up until midnight to fellowship is fun, but can make it very difficult for the missionary to function.
- A place to do laundry is very helpful. Access to an iron and ironing board is needed as well.
- For the missionary to keep up with his work, internet access where they are staying is a necessity.