

postings

The Missions Mobilizers' E-newsletter

AUGUST 2015
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I Wish My Church Understood



ADDRESSING OFTEN UNSPOKEN MISSIONARY STRUGGLES

How can we establish and maintain healthy dialog between global workers and their sending/supporting churches?

Transparency and sensitivity on the part of both parties are essential.

In this issue of *Postings*, we have used hypothetical conversations to highlight what churches sometimes say to their missionaries and what global workers may be thinking.

We then suggest alternate church messages that could open doors for greater transparency and benefit.

What churches sometimes communicate...

The first Sunday you're back we want you to give us a report on all God has done through you on your last term and what you will be doing when you go back.



We are coming home physically exhausted, emotionally wounded, and/or spiritually dry. At this point, we're struggling to believe God did anything significant through us last term, and we're not sure if we even want to go back. We don't want to fake an enthusiasm we don't feel right now.

What missionaries may be thinking...

We recognize that you are finishing a very demanding term on the field.

When you first get back, we want to strongly encourage you to take at least two weeks of vacation to rest and transition.

Our church is designating \$1,000 toward the cost of this "retreat" time. When you feel ready, members of our missions team will sit down with you to determine together how we can help make your home assignment most beneficial to you,

your ministry, and our church.

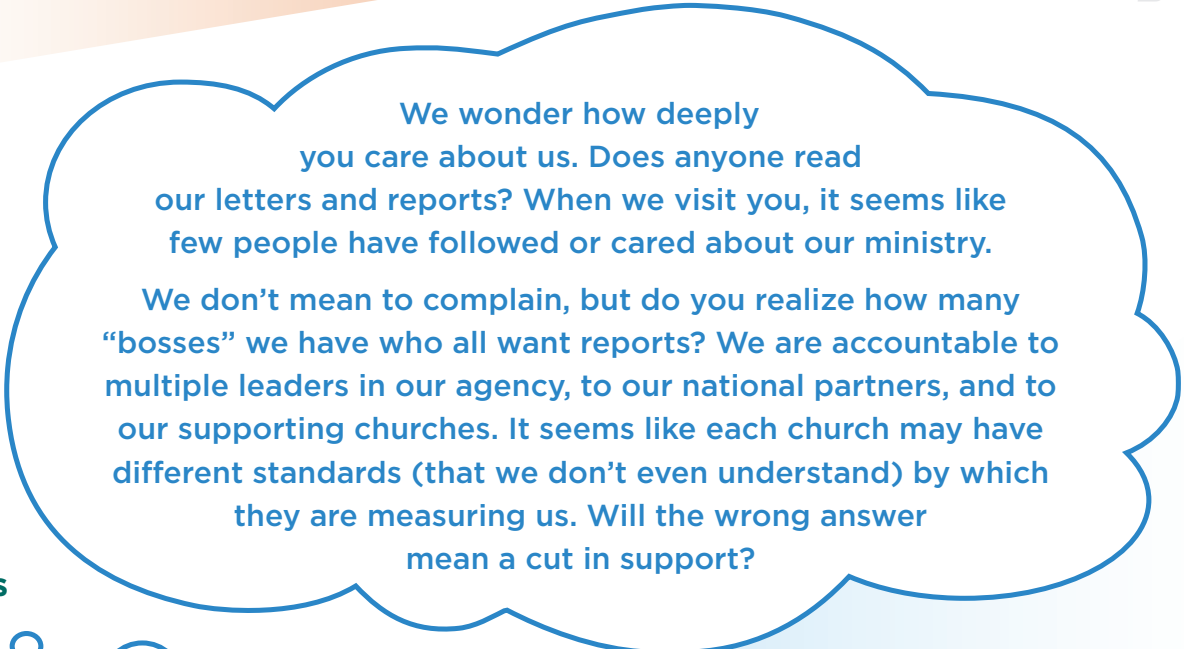
An alternative church message, especially from a sending church...



What churches sometimes communicate...



While you are here, our missions team will meet with you to evaluate your ministry. Please send us the answers to these 25 questions.



We wonder how deeply you care about us. Does anyone read our letters and reports? When we visit you, it seems like few people have followed or cared about our ministry. We don't mean to complain, but do you realize how many "bosses" we have who all want reports? We are accountable to multiple leaders in our agency, to our national partners, and to our supporting churches. It seems like each church may have different standards (that we don't even understand) by which they are measuring us. Will the wrong answer mean a cut in support?

What missionaries may be thinking...

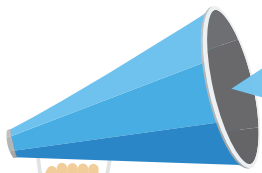


To avoid extra work, if you have a report you already submit elsewhere, just copy that document to us. From time to time we will also arrange a Skype meeting to better assess how you are doing and see how we can improve our service as your sending church. Occasionally we will want to include someone from your agency in that meeting to make sure we are all on the same page.

During your term on the field, your financial support will not be impacted by the accountability process unless there are areas where our ministry covenant is no longer being fulfilled. When you return for home assignment, we will review our partnership and openly discuss all aspects of our relationship.

Feel free to ask questions at any time about our process.

An alternative church message, especially from a sending church...



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What churches sometimes communicate...



Our services are very carefully programmed, so you will have three minutes to present your report. You cannot go overtime.

What missionaries may be thinking...

Our culture at-large and our church culture are always shifting, and have continued to change while you were gone. Today our people are bombarded by so many messages that we have to carefully select the best way to engage them with you and your ministry.

The most life-changing connections are personal relationships, not platform time. So we will work with you to create a three-minute video that opens doors for individual dialog. We will be happy to help you brainstorm how to expand relationships. Let's schedule a Skype call to plan our strategy.

We don't understand the changes in churches back home. It often seems like life, including church life, is fast tracked and superficial. How could we possibly summarize three years in three minutes?

An alternative church message, especially from a sending church...



You must feel so blessed to work with godly fellow missionaries and local believers!

What missionaries may be thinking...

We are wrestling with unresolved tensions with our field teammates, our national partners, and/or our agency. We are not sure that we can continue because of the deep differences. Is it safe to be honest with you about these relationship problems?

What churches sometimes communicate...



We are glad you have such a diverse team, but we realize that it can be very difficult to blend cultures, philosophies, and personalities. Our missionary care team would like to hear about the challenges, if you feel comfortable in sharing them. We really want to be able to pray more specifically and care more adequately for you.

An alternative church message, especially from a sending church...



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We assume you will stay with your parents for the year you are home. It is good your sister could take care of them after their multiple hospitalizations, freeing you to serve the Lord overseas.

Our youth director has scheduled time for your teenager to speak to the youth group (please have her wear national clothing). We would like your younger children to sing a song in the worship service.

What churches sometimes communicate...



We want to be near our families during home assignment as we often feel guilty about living so far away from them and not carrying our responsibility for their care. However, sharing living space can be very stressful. Please understand that we need our own home. Generally our kids like to come back and just blend in with their peers rather than be up front. Pray with us about their adjustment and understand that we may struggle with guilt if our children sometimes resent being MKs.

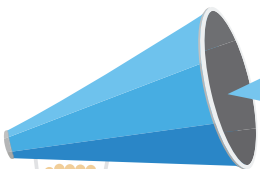
What missionaries may be thinking...



What type of housing arrangement would work best for your family on this home assignment? Can we help you look for a good option? Talk to us if you need financial assistance to make it affordable.

Let's chat about what will help your children be comfortable in our church and adjust to our culture. We know you are also concerned about your parents as they age. How can we as a church help you serve their needs and feel well connected?

An alternative church message, especially from a sending church...



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You are our heroes! We want you to give the concluding sermon of our missions conference, stirring others to follow your example of giving up everything for Christ!

What churches sometimes communicate...

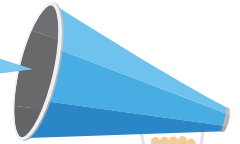
What missionaries may be thinking...



If you only knew how inadequate we feel much of the time in ministry. Far from being spiritual heroes, we struggle to follow Christ just like everyone else. Please don't automatically assume we should preach or carry full responsibility to motivate others to missions. Many of us don't have the gift or experience to preach well. We love to share our passion, but in smaller groups or one-on-one.

After two of our missions team members visited you on the field, we began to understand much better why the needs can seem overwhelming. We as a church want to share this burden to reach and serve your city. Let's sit down and talk about how you are most comfortable sharing your passion with us. Together, we will brainstorm how to mobilize our congregation to be a more effective part of your team.

An alternative church message, especially from a sending church...



What churches sometimes communicate...



We understand that all global workers are dealing with major conflicts and need counseling. We want you to meet with our church psychologist for intensive family sessions to address problems.

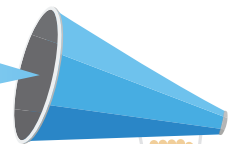
What missionaries may be thinking...



Please don't make assumptions! We are doing great! None of the above issues are true in our lives right now. We may experience any or all of these in the future, or maybe we have in the past, but right now things are terrific. Our family is doing well and our ministry is exciting!

We are thrilled that so many good things are happening in your ministry right now. Since your needs regularly change, we want to design our church's assistance to be what is most beneficial right now in your field ministry (or while you are on home assignment). Let's schedule a Skype call to talk about what we can do that will best serve you and the ministry we are committed to together.

An alternative church message, especially from a sending church...



A few missionary comments when asked about these issues...

- ⊕ It's so helpful to be "invited in" by church members rather than always having to take the initiative. For instance, it's great when someone asks me if we can get together rather than always expecting me, the missionary, to issue the invitation.
- ⊖ It's very disappointing when people don't seem very interested in hearing about the spiritual progress (or reversal) of our ministries on the field. It felt like they would rather talk about the food, the culture, the bugs and snakes, etc., rather than about lives changed by the grace and power of God.
- ⊖ I love my sending church, but sometimes I struggle because the services now feel shallow. When I'm back home, I go on Sunday morning to see my church family, but I don't necessarily feel the same emotional high I felt at services before I left for the field.
- ⊕ The church might be able to receive and accept vulnerability better than we missionaries sometimes expect. We need to give the church a chance by first being transparent with a smaller group. If that goes well, we can open up more with a larger group at that church.
- ⊖ Sometimes when we came on home assignment, we didn't know where the next place of ministry would be. To be continuously bombarded with "Where are you are going next?" was extremely difficult.
- ⊕ Good communication is a huge part of a good relationship. I called my pastor when there was a crisis on the field. He let me know that the church leaders saw it as involving the whole church, not just me. That was such a powerful encouragement.
- ⊖ We wondered if churches had the same financial standard for their missionaries as for their staff. If they give a cost of living adjustment to staff, do they also give it to their missionaries? Sometimes it seemed like they thought we should just be thankful that we received anything.
- ⊕ My church sent several people out to visit me. That was huge.
- ⊕ Our sending church considered me an associate staff person while I was on home assignment. They gave me an office and included me in staff meetings. I felt affirmed and included in the church.
- ⊕ Prior to home assignment, our sending church sent pictures of the Sunday school class our daughters were going to join with the names of each person. Our first Sunday back, someone met us at the door, and a teen walked into the youth group with our girls. That was so beautiful for our kids.

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