

Raising Support and Finding a Home Church

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Raising Support

Some people who are willing to serve as a missionary to a foreign culture never get to go, and the biggest obstacles which have kept many from going are often: (1) raising enough financial support, and (2) finding a home church to send and sponsor them. This section is designed to help you face both of these challenges.

The biblical model.

As you know, the apostle Paul is one of our best role models for Christian mission work. His first missionary journey with Barnabas was launched while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting with the church in Antioch. The Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." The church fasted and prayed further, placed their hands on them and sent them off. The text says they were "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit."

To be missionaries like Paul, we also need to pray and know that God is calling us – that we are doing his work, not ours – "the work to which he has called us."

We each also need the love of a congregation of believers to help us and send us out. If Paul, an inspired apostle, needed the blessings and love of the Antioch church, how much more do we need that from the brothers and sisters we are leaving? We are blessed indeed if a body of believers sends us off in a way similar to the way the Antioch church sent off Paul and Barnabas.

The attitude you need.

Because what you are doing is the Lord's work, when you ask people to help you do it, you are not a bother but a blessing. You honor people when you ask them to become partners with you in a good work. You are giving them a chance to work with you and be a vital part of your ministry. So educate your feelings: not, "I'm asking for money," but "I'm telling people about something the Lord is doing (or wants to do) in the world (and with me), and I'm giving them a chance to be part of it."

When Paul wrote at length about financial giving, his primary word for what was shared was not "money." It was "grace." Read 2 Corinthians 8-9 again to catch his spirit.

Do not be timid or lazy in asking people for support. Paul encouraged Timothy by reminding him that "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). People are encouraged to help you when they see you confident in what you are doing for the Lord and willing to work hard to accomplish it.

Since you are asking people to help God in his work, remember that their decision is first between them and the Lord. Feel humble and honored when people decide to help you, since there are many other good works they could have given that money to instead. And do not take offense if they decide not to help you financially. That may be the right choice for them at this time. Ask them to support you in prayer. Keep them informed about your progress. They may help you more later.

Where and how to start?

There are now many resources available on the internet to help you raise funds for missions. A simple search with words like "raising support missions" can direct you to many helpful sites, full of ideas and strategies, plus videos and newsletters.

Some basics:

1. To be a missionary is to be a fund raiser. Even before he visited them, Paul told the Christians in Rome, "When I go to Spain . . . I hope to . . . to have you assist me on my journey there."

(Romans 15:24). Like him, you need to always be thinking ahead to what will be needed, and then willing to ask people for their help.

2. You have to approach people and ask them for help. There is no way around this. You can use general appeals, form letters and hints – but do not put your trust in them. People need to be asked, personally, by you. Don't sit wait for them to approach you. Doing this may not feel comfortable, but mission work requires us to do uncomfortable things. By all means, send out letters, but then follow up those letters with phone calls.
3. You must work through those who know you best. If friends and relatives (and the churches in which they are members) won't help you, why should anyone else want to?
4. You can build on success to inspire further success. Individual motives for giving vary, but almost everyone likes to give to a cause which has other people's support also. Use this fact, and take heart in it. Once you have some financial support raised or promised, the rest often comes easier.
5. Asking someone for support is a request more for their prayers than their money. Since this is after all the Spirit's work, we need everyone's help to keep it constantly bathed in prayer. Give to them, also, by committing to pray for them.

How do you find people and get them to make donations? Here are some suggestions:

1. Pray daily to the Lord to provide your finances.
2. Make a list of individuals and churches with who you can share your plans and needs. These people may come from:
 - a. Your home church missions committee or eldership.
 - b. The members in the church where you grew up.
 - c. Other churches which know you or your family. Friends and acquaintances at each of these churches.
 - d. People where you have worked, both before and now.
 - e. Other acquaintances outside your normal church circles (neighbors, for instance).
 - f. Friends and alumni from your school.
 - g. Friends involved in other Christian ministries.
 - h. Friends and contacts of your parents.
 - i. Relatives.
 - j. Christian contacts at your university (e.g., professors, administrators, staff)
 - k. Christian parents of your friends.
 - l. Your close friends.
 - m. The names you get when you ask the people above who they know who you might approach. By constantly asking and building your list, you will never run out of names.
3. Prioritize your list into your "Top 10," Second 10, Third 10 and so on. The "Top 10" donors or sponsors will probably provide at least two-thirds of your financial support.
4. Pray further, and then contact each person on your "Top 10" list. Set yourself a deadline to get this done. Decide the best way to contact each person and, if appropriate, what gift range you want to ask them to consider giving.
 - a. Prayerfully individualize your fund-raising appeals. Approach people through formal presentations, committee meetings, luncheon appointments, personal notes – however seems right for that person. Do not limit your approach to only one method for all people, or limit yourself to asking people only once.
 - b. Ask appropriately, according to what is realistic. A "widow's mite" gift may seem small towards your overall goal, but it may bring great glory to God and dignity to the person who gives it. Some people who seem to have very little also want to be a part of God's work. They may surprise you with their generosity.
 - c. Don't be afraid to ask for large gifts of money.
 - d. Ask for both one-time gifts and monthly commitments for the time you will be serving in this ministry. Many people who cannot give in one way can give in another way.
5. Keep good records and continue to build your list of contacts. Ways to contact people include:
 - a. Letters of appeal. (Click here to see sample letters. These sample letters and RSVP chart can help you get started.)
 - b. Face-to-face funding presentations.
 - c. Phone call, followed with an information letter and response card and envelope.
 - d. Fund-raising letter with an information sheet and response card and envelope, followed up by a phone call if they do not get back to you in time.
 - e. Church presentation. Ask the elders for permission to speak to the entire congregation.

- f. Videos. PowerPoint presentations. Brochures. Music. Be creative. Show people that you are serious and have put thought into your mission. But keep it simple. A simple, heartfelt appeal is often more effective than a technological masterpiece.
 - g. If a church will not let you make your own appeal, ask a staff minister or an elder to make one for you.
6. Follow up with everyone as planned and as promised. Write thank you notes to everyone who was willing to talk to you, whether or not they decided to help you.
 7. Repeat steps 4-6 for your second 10.
 8. Continue steps 4-6 until you reach 100% of your fund raising goal. More than 100%, if possible. There will be expenses you did not budget for.
 9. Consider other options for fund raising, such as:
 - a. Car washes. Ask children's or youth groups to help.
 - b. Manual work for the elderly in exchange for a donation.
 - c. Special dinners.
 - d. Yard and garage sales.
 - e. Save a percentage of your paycheck, or take on extra work to earn money, towards what you will need overseas.

Finding a Home Church

As a person willing to be sent on a mission, you need a stable congregation willing to serve as your sending (or sponsoring, or home) church. This, too, you probably will find only by praying and asking. As with approaching individuals, when you ask a church to become a partner with you in ministry, you help that church. You give it an opportunity to expand its missionary vision and activities, and do the work to which God has called it.

Ideally, your home (or sending) church would be the church which knows you best, e.g., one where you grew up or spent a lot of time during your youth or university days. If you do not have such a church, you may need to offer to spend extra time with a church before you leave, to serve and build relationships within that church family. The better you are known by your home church, the richer and better enabled will be your missionary work together.

Do I have to have a home church?

The Apostle Paul's life makes it clear that there is more than one way to begin a mission trip. His second journey was launched when he simply said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." There is no mention of either the Holy Spirit calling them or of the church sending them out, but it is clear Paul was guided by the Spirit as he traveled and taught. We all likewise must pray and use our best judgment to decide which course to take. But it is clear Paul made great effort to report back to his "home" church (Antioch) and the church in Jerusalem all that the Lord was doing through his efforts. He constantly was writing and reporting to all the believers who had helped and become a part of his work, and to everyone else he could. He knew that telling people about his work for the Lord was a great way to encourage and involve other believers. We encourage you to think like him.

Even if it is not "ideal" or a highly mission-minded church, we believe you should find some church to serve as your home church for the following reasons:

1. A home church gives everyone who wants to support your work a legitimate way to make a tax-exempt donation to your ministry, i.e., by sending the money to a church rather than an individual.
2. A home church helps to endorse your work and give it legitimacy. It indicates that a body of believers believes also in you and in your ministry.
3. A home church gives your ministry added moorings and stability – a body of believers to which you are accountable.

Responsibilities of the home church.

The home church should be the primary church responsible, and praying, for you while you fulfill your missionary commitment. It may not provide all your financial support, but it should be willing to give a sizeable portion of your support, collect donations from your supporters, and see that all the money collected is sent to you in a timely manner.

When a home church could not provide all of an A.I. worker's support, other churches or individuals have committed to provide, for example, the support needed for their working expenses.

The home church may also serve as the communication hub, helping you distribute newsletters or other information about your ministry. Above all, it should commit to holding you up in prayer on a regular basis, reminding the congregation frequently about your work and reporting your needs and news. In short, this church should "adopt" you as one of its own members – someone who is on a temporary, long distance assignment.

Whether the home church guides its mission work through an individual, a missions committee or the entire eldership, it should commit itself to continually evaluating and improving its mission's efforts. It should want to learn how best to care and help its missionaries. As one of its missionaries, you can help it do this. The Missions Resource Network has many good articles which detail the role and responsibilities of sending churches and other ways in which churches can become more missions minded. Click here (http://www.mrnet.org/Resources/Resources_Index.asp?NTier=RESOURCES) to become familiar with them, then share resources like this with your home church.

How can you help your home church keep in touch and understand your ministry?

Every church should continually promote its mission efforts in fun, creative ways. To stimulate further ideas, the following is a list of ways your home church (and others) can promote your work and keep the churches connected and caring about you and what the Lord is doing through you. You can put some of these ideas into place before you leave the States.

- Postcards. Pre-printed cards available in the foyer, and a box for mailing them, make it easy for people to write you a note.
- Singing. Perhaps you can teach the church to sing some simple songs in English and your target language.
- Regular reports. Figure out how best to write and distribute them. How often? How long? Short, frequent notes are better than sporadic, long epistles. How can you best use the church web page and blogging? Work with the church secretary to make sure that your communication flows well.
- Videos. Video feeds.
- Tapes.
- Calls. Live conversations.
- Children's programs focused on Italy and your work.
- Maps on the walls. Decorations.
- Bulletin board with your news/prayer requests.
- Messages to specific classes to explain and pray for specific needs.
- Sermons which mention your work.
- Personal visits by members to your ministry.
- Extra money in the budget for visiting missionaries or communicating with them.
- Prayer groups.
- Liaison. One key member should be designated as your liaison, responsible to correspond with you and communicate your needs to the rest of the home congregation.

Whatever other ideas you come up with, make sure that you enter into the life of the church and keep in touch with what is happening in that body of believers while you are away. Prepare for its special days. Look for ways to bless your home church.

Prayer for the missions' committee families. Ask the church for news from home. Encourage all of the members to write you. Do not be ashamed to ask for help. The more they can do for you, the closer they will feel to you.

Blessings in Christ as you build these relationships and serve the Lord!