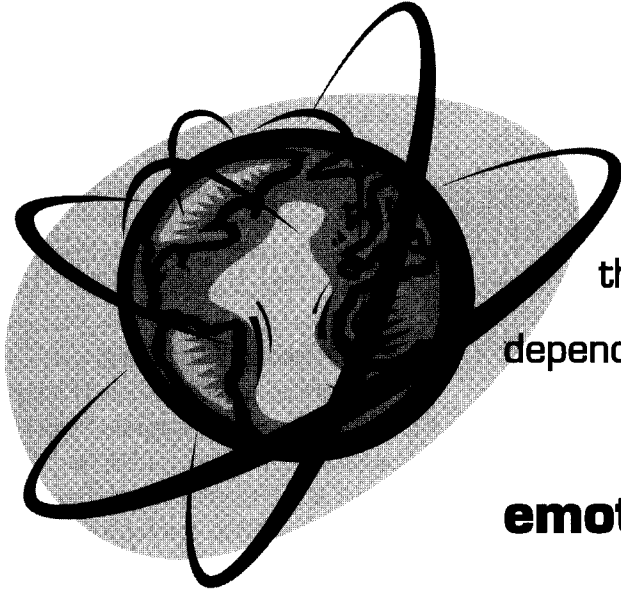


And Now a Word for Our Sponsors ...

by Jessica Henman



Missionaries need more from their sponsoring congregations than dependable **financial** support.

They **also** need **physical, emotional** and **spiritual** support.

When we had been married two years, my husband started a new job. Like every good daughter, I wanted to tell my mom all about it. My description could have gone something like this:

“Mark just got a new job! His salary is whatever we need it to be – as long as we can account for how we spend it all. Hours? Oh, they didn’t bother giving him a schedule; he’ll just pretty much work every day and be on call 24 hours a day. That won’t be a problem, though, because we’ll live at the office.

“His bosses are nice. They hope to hear from us every month and won’t even bother us with any responses or evaluations.

“The one down side is that his salary won’t ever increase. In fact, we know some friends who worked for the same group, and their salary got cut without any warning. We can deal with that, though, because this is something Mark and I have always wanted to do.”

Would you want your son-in-law to

take this job? And have you caught on that this is the job description for many missionaries? If you see your congregation’s missions program resembling any part of this description, read on!

To what, exactly, does a church commit when it decides to support missionaries? Is sending a monthly check enough? What more would missionaries wish for? And how can you start being more supportive?

Take this pop quiz: Name all the missionaries your church supports, the cities in which they live, and the names of their family members. Tough assignment? Then you’ve just answered the question of how to start.

Before we can really support a missionary family, we need to know them. Write a letter to ask them questions. Send an e-mail. Call the missionary or their stateside family. Better yet, read their newsletters!

Find out about their kids, hobbies, background, goals and struggles. While you are getting to know them, make an effort to learn more about

the area in which they work – the language they speak, the prominent religions, the local food.

This is a terrific way to get your own children or Bible class students involved, digging for information at the library or on the Internet. Then share what you discover about the new culture.

Your missionary’s wife will be delighted to tell you all about her new home. If I had a problem talking about our ministry overseas, it was in not knowing when to stop. Nothing is more enjoyable than sharing your passion with an interested audience.

Once you know a little more about those people whose pictures are on the foyer wall, you are ready to support them. Missionaries long for much more from churches than just that monthly check. They need physical, emotional, mental and spiritual support in addition to dependable financial support.

If someone asked me to name the greatest gift I received while on the mission field, I would say beet

recipes. Mark and I ministered in the small country of Georgia. Beets were abundant there in the winter, when little else was.

In one of our newsletters, we mentioned this fact. Shortly thereafter, a couple of dear sisters took it upon themselves to collect every beet recipe known to man and send them to us. I think I received 211 beet recipes! Our hearts were touched beyond measure at the love they were showing us by meeting our need so sweetly.

Physical Needs

What do your missionaries have to work with on the field? What do they need? Can you supply it?

When my parents visited us on the field, Mom was a little startled when I asked her to limit her mustard usage on a sandwich because it was very difficult for me to get. Do your missionaries have mustard? Can they get gelatin and powdered soft drink mixes for their children?

As you consider physical needs on

the field, don't forget those that arise when missionaries return to the United States, whether for furlough or permanently. Many sold all they had to go to the mission field and so come home with little or nothing.

I cry every time I tell someone how the Overland Church of Christ blessed us when we returned to the United States to have a baby. Word got out that we had no furniture, so the church went to work and absolutely filled a house for us. After we had been home a week, we had to ask people to stop bringing us things because we didn't have any room left! Praise God for each of them!

Emotional Needs

Regardless if a missionary's physical needs are met, no one can survive without emotional support. How many English-speaking friends do you have? Missionaries in some areas have only their families or perhaps a small mission team with whom they can speak freely in their own language.

Loneliness is probably the greatest challenge missionaries face. If good support systems are not in place through letters, phone calls or e-mail, the missionaries must carry their burdens alone. Even a husband cannot always totally support his wife when he is consumed with his own special needs and the needs of the area.

My mom frequently threatens to send me back to Georgia because I communicated with her more often while I was there via e-mail. I even got carpal tunnel syndrome because I desperately needed to talk with someone who shared my perspective.

Holidays are particularly trying for those who serve God far from home. Something as simple as a card can make a world of difference, helping them feel remembered and loved.

Spiritual Needs

Finally, the issue of spiritual support needs to be addressed. Many fall into the delusion that missionaries are

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indestructible spiritual giants. I believe they will all agree with me that we most certainly are not! We simply could not resist a calling, and that calling just happened to be further away from home than yours.

Nowhere is faith tested on a more regular basis than on the mission field. A missionary is faced with tough questions on a daily basis, with no one to send the questioner to if he or she doesn't know the answer.

Missionaries are usually the teachers, nursery workers, secretaries, deacons, preachers, elders and janitors, all rolled into one couple. Most missionaries feel personally responsible for every soul around them, no matter how many times they repeat the mantra, "I plant; God harvests. I plant; God harvests."

Without strong spiritual guidance and comfort from back home, missionaries can burn out in a matter of months. This guidance and comfort can take many forms that both men and women can implement.

Pray for your missionaries daily and tell them about your prayers. Knowing that a person is praying specifically for you is very strengthening. To do this effectively, you must learn about them, about their burdens and what they need to relieve those burdens.

Encourage your church leadership to be actively involved in the mission. Be the missionary's advocate not only when budget time comes around but also when they are dealing with a difficult spiritual issue.

Take an interest in the local Christians with whom your missionaries work. Babes in Christ are encouraged when older Christians are interested in their spiritual growth, as well as their daily lives.

I'll never forget when our Georgian brother Vaso was baptized. He asked every person present, "You are my sister/brother now, yes?" Why did he want to know? Because it makes the spirit strong to know that you are not alone in the race.

Let me leave you with one last bit of God's Word. In 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:1, Paul gives us familiar but vital instruction: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but

have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (NIV).

It all comes down to this: in evangelism, everyone has a job, not just the missionaries. Their job is to minister; yours, equally important, is to love and support them. □

Jessica Henman is a nurse and a Harding University graduate who is now a member of the Overland Church of Christ in St. Louis, Mo., where she works as a missions coordinator. She and her husband, Mark, have a daughter and served two years as full-time missionaries in the country of Georgia.

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