

Missionary Deputation / Prefield Practices

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Deputation / Prefield Ministry Practices

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Why does it take missionaries on average three years to raise the needed prayer and financial support to get to the mission field? Are the present practices of raising prayer and finances biblical and the best way to approach this challenge? Could there be other approaches that would be closer to biblical principle and practice? What is the local churches biblical responsibility in assisting the missionary? What improvements are needed to assist the missionary in support raising? These and other questions will need to be addressed by the church if there is to be effective global ministry.

I. THE DEPUTATION / PREFIELD JOURNEY

Deputation, or as it is coming to be known, Prefield Ministry, refers to the process of raising sufficient prayer and financial support to enable the individual or family to serve as a missionary. It is a period of time that the appointed missionary goes from church to church sharing the ministry they will have in their adopted country, and ask the church for prayer and financial support to be given on a regular monthly basis. Deputation / Prefield Ministry begins after the missionary is appointed by the mission agency, and extends until the missionary has reached 100% financial support. This normally takes about two and one-half to three years to accomplish.

Historically, when we think of missionary deputation, we think of the time period in which the missionary raises his financial support. In more recent years, the term has been changed to Prefield Ministry, because it emphasizes the period of time spent in preparing for cross-cultural ministry. The traditional missionary deputation period of time had one focus, raising financial support to get to the field. Prefield Ministry is different in that it has become multi-faceted. Along with raising financial support from churches and individuals, Prefield

Ministry involves a personalized educational, mentoring, and training program. This preparation equips the missionary in theological and ministry experience, cultural and language preparations, and marriage and family counseling. This is a growing trend in missions today. The results are lower attrition rates, and better equipped missionaries for excellence in their life-long ministries.

In the evangelical church today, we see troubling trends. Some of these are:

- missionaries chronically under supported
- missionaries ready to go but adequate finances not available
- more missionaries than money available
- evangelical giving rate is 2.6 per cent
- pastors and churches do not seem to understand their role in missions
- passive, complacent attitude in evangelical churches
- missionaries left to be 'lone rangers' in the missions endeavor
- ill-equipped missionaries
- high attrition rates, many not returning after their first term

If the evangelical church is to reverse these ominous trends, there must be attention given to the clear teaching in God's Word on the theology of the church and the responsibility for care of the missionary in the churches' global ministry endeavor.

One mission agency, Association of Baptist for World Evangelism, is working to change these trends among the churches that support their missionaries. The following Prefield statistics show the results of this new paradigm shift of making Prefield Ministry a personalized educational, mentoring, and training program. They are early into this new paradigm, and progress is beginning to show. For the past five years (2001-2005), ABWE has appointed an average of 68 missionaries per year, and released an average of 42 missionaries per year to their fields. They are experiencing 3.2% attrition rate over the past ten years, while the average from other agencies in the past ten years is 8% attrition rate. These percentages include deaths,

dismissals, resignations, and retirements. Though the following statistics are not fantastic, they do show an upward trend from what other agencies are experiencing.

Prefield statistics from 2001-2005:

- Average months on prefield – 30
- Financial % from churches – 68%
- Financial % from individuals – 32%
- Number of church supporters – 17
- Number of individual supporters – 24
- % support from sending church – 21%

When you look at these statistics, it begs the question, is there more that could be done to improve the current model and practices of raising financial support and missionary care? We will discuss some possible answers and solutions to this question in the section “Proposed Improvements”.

II. BIBLICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Word of God has a lot to say about finances and care for the missionary. There are over seven hundred passages that deal with finances, and hundreds more that relate to stewardship and wealth. The Bible is also very specific in how the church is to function as a family and how to provide for the needs of those who minister on behalf of the church. Yet, in all of these passages, we cannot find a biblical mandate for the practices of raising prayer and financial support. There are principles and commands for such, but no biblical mandate for a model for support raising as we know it in Prefield Ministry.

A. Theology of the Church

Our biblical mandate and theological foundation for the church and her ministry is very clear in Scripture. The Christian Church is a New Testament institution, beginning with

Pentecost. The New Testament use of the word Church is formed from two Greek words “*ecclesia*” meaning to call out from, and “*kuriakon*” meaning that which belongs to the Lord. The Church is composed of the body of believers who have been called out from the world, and who are under the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

Historically, the Apostles founded the Church (Acts 1–2:47). The first church was at Jerusalem and now spreads throughout the world, yet it is still one church (body). In studying the passages dealing with the Church, we find clear teaching about how Christ wants His Church to function as the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-16 is a summative passage on the theology of the Church. All that the Church is to do and be can be found here. I Corinthians 12:12-27, instructs us on how members of the body are to relate and function with one another. As the children of God, we are family. Families do not live as lone individuals, but as a cohesive community. As a body of Christ, we do not live unto ourselves, but as ‘one another’ family members ministering to each other. Scriptures describe for us thirty-six ‘one another’ commands. Since we share a oneness (*koinonia*), each member of the body is critical for the health of the body. I Corinthians 12 instructs the Church that there is an interconnectedness within the body of Christ. Therefore, we have a divine obligation and responsibility as the Church (body) to provide for one another.

B. Biblical Giving

So, should our missionaries raise (receive) support to enable them to go and minister on behalf of the Body? There are two things to consider from this question.

First, Scripture does teach a pattern for us to give. In Numbers 18:21-24, God instructs Israel to give a tithe to support their spiritual leaders, the Levites. This is God’s plan, not something man devised. In Luke 8:1-3, we see Jesus receiving support from “*many others who*

provided for Him from their substance.” The Lord Jesus received gifts from friends during His public ministry. The twelve disciples were with Him and received substance for their needs, too. When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples in Matthew 10:5-15, He instructed them not to take any provisions for themselves. Rather, they were to depend on God to supply their needs through His people. In Romans 15:24, Paul says, *“whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.”* He clearly expected to receive provisions from them. Again, in II Corinthians 1:15-16, Paul asks for and expected financial assistance from the church at Corinth. Pastor Gaius and his church in III John, provides an excellent example of generosity. Verses 5 through 8 may form a biblical basis for financial support for global ministry. Gaius was commended for sending the servants of God *“forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God,”* verse 6. Verse 8 tells the Church, she is under a sacred obligation to show hospitality, and in so doing *“we may become fellow workers for the truth.”*

Secondly, Scriptures teach it is the Church that is responsible to “send”. In Acts 13:1-4, the church at Antioch were lead by the Holy Spirit to *“separate . . . Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* There is not any volunteerism found in this passage of Scripture. It was the Holy Spirit that led the church to send these men on their way. Given what we know from Ephesians 4 and I Corinthians 12 about how the Church (Body) is to function, I believe it is the divine obligation and responsibility of the Church (body) to provide for one another. This most certainly includes providing for the needs of the servants of God (missionaries). The Church, God’s people, must give in order to be obedient (I Corinthians 9:13,14; II Corinthians 8:1-9, 12-13; 9:8, 14; Philippians 4:10, 14).

Romans 10:14-15 speaks to the biblical pattern for doing global ministry, “*And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?*” The Church is key to global ministry, for it is the launching pad. It takes a team (family of God), those who go and those who serve as senders. The missionary is the one to go, the sender is the Church.

In 1789, William Carey became the pastor of a small Baptist church in the local association of Particular Baptists. Two years later he published his groundbreaking missionary manifesto, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians for the Conversion of the Heathens*. This short book consists of five parts. In the fifth part, it calls for the formation by the Baptist denomination for a missionary society and describes the practical means by which it could be supported. Carey later overcame the resistance to missionary service, and the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen (now the Baptist Missionary Society) was founded in October 1791. This association of Baptist churches agreed upon the practical matters of raising funds and how they would direct their efforts. The association Pastors and their churches agreed to fully support Carey and Dr. John Thomas to India.

The story of Carey illustrates for us a model that is in keeping with biblical principles and commands concerning the purpose and responsibilities of the Church. Again, I repeat, the Church has a divine obligation and responsibility to take the lead in sending their missionary to the field. This is not limited to finances, but in every area of care.

We have the questions posed in Romans 10:14-15, but here’s a question we face in the global ministry of the church, *how shall we send?* We will dedicate the rest of this paper to discuss some possible ideas for improving the practices of Deputation / Prefield ministry that will honor and live up to the biblical principles, commands, and theology of the church.

III. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

The challenge the Church faces today is to understand its purpose and role in global ministry, and then to lead its members in fulfilling the Great Commission as either a go'er or as a sender. The Church is anemic at best in its present involvement. The members of most churches have no interest or concern for missions because of the lack of passion and vision from its leaders. There needs to be a great awakening among the North American churches to God's purpose for the church. For many, all that is required is education. The heart is there, but the vision and strategy is missing. Once the church has been biblically educated in its role in global ministry, resources and training must be provided to assist in carrying out God's plan to reach man. A big part of carrying out global ministry is sending missionaries. But how shall they be sent? What can be done for the church to biblically fulfill its divine obligation and responsibility? Missionaries are spending 30 plus months raising support. During this time they will make a thousand contacts, visit three hundred churches, and wear out an automobile in securing their monthly support level. Yet, the Church appears to fall short with the responsibility of caring for her missionaries. There has to be more the church can do.

Aside from what is presently being done, the following are some proposed improvements. These improvements, with the proper organization and implementation, will assist the Church in her biblical obligation and responsibility. The improvements will not only get the missionary to the field quicker, but will energize the church with a passion for God and a heart for the world. Another goal behind each of the proposed improvements is to educate the church in understanding her role as the 'sender' and how to accomplish it.

A. Church Partnership Program

As churches come to the realization that the local church is the primary source for global ministry (missions), they will need to discover the resources available from other like-minded churches. Together, they can make a greater difference in approaching the needs created from the Prefield Ministry task. The goal is to get the missionary to the field quicker by assisting them in raising prayer and financial support. The following idea and information is a description how this is being practiced in three different areas of the United States. It is a concept with biblical roots and relevance to our contemporary / postmodern world.

The Church Partnership Program is a consortium (alliance) of local churches joining together in order to address the challenges of assisting their missionaries in raising prayer and financial support as quickly as possible. Each church shares in the support of missionaries coming from the partnership churches, thus raising the support quickly. The West Michigan Missions Consortium states their purpose with these words, *“The Consortium is a plan for churches of like faith and missionary vision to cooperate for the purpose of quickly raising prayer and financial support for member church missionaries and to enhance worldwide mission outreach. The goal is to bring missionary candidates to full support level as quickly and efficiently as possible.”* This sort of effort will enable the partnering churches to cooperate in getting their missionaries to the field in a more efficient and effective way, without de-energizing the missionary.

Getting pastors and churches to be a part of an innovative partnership for missions support is not an easy undertaking. It is, however, worth the effort to energize our churches in the responsibility of the Great Commission.

The following guidelines have been compiled from three different partnerships (consortiums), PrayerTeam (ten evangelical churches in Southern Connecticut), West Michigan

Missions Consortium, and a consortium based out of Heritage Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. May we learn from those who have gone before in how this concept can and will work.

- Organization:
 - 1) Each member church selects two representatives to serve on the committee, one pastoral staff member and one lay person.
 - 2) The committee elects a chairperson and other officers as needed.
 - 3) Each member will inform, challenge and encourage their individual church.
 - 4) The Partnership will handle no funds. Each church will work with the sending church and the mission agency in matters of finances.
 - 5) Meetings will be held quarterly (three or four times a year) or upon the request of any member church.
 - 6) Each member church maintains its own missions program in addition to the Partnership involvement.

- Implementation

It only takes one pastor who has a burning passion for global ministry to get a Partnership going. The logical process steps in implementing a Partnership might look like this:

 - 1) Visit other pastors and express your passion for getting people into missions and the delay in getting them to the field.
 - 2) Invite them to join a missions think tank to address the challenges.
 - 3) Consult with various mission agencies and other church partnership groups.
 - 4) After working through all the concerns of each church, put together a constitution, by-laws, and missionary application form(s).

- Benefits for the Partnership Churches and Missionaries
 - 1) Encourages the church members to commit to missions knowing they will not have to do it as a 'lone ranger'.
 - 2) Missionary care such as housing, automobiles, children's education, etc., can be used more efficiently by staying in the same region for furlough.

- 3) Missionary Conferences and other missions emphasis can be coordinated among the Partnership churches.
- 4) Regular visits to the mission fields can be coordinated by the Partnership making even greater impact for both the missionary and the Partnership churches.
- 5) Short-Term mission projects for lay people will give more opportunity to each church. Churches can participate together on such trips.
- 6) Missionary support is raised more quickly.
- 7) Churches will have a purposeful, cooperative ministry.
- 8) Cuts the expenses of extended prefield and deputation travel.
- 9) Greater ownership of the congregation to their missionary.
- 10) Prefield ministry is more productive by giving time to training and spiritual growth needs.
- 11) Greater personalized spiritual and emotional support is given to the missionary family.
- 12) Missionaries will have longer periods of time in each of the Partnership churches.
- 13) Missionary children will have a more stable environment for schooling and friendships during prefield ministry and furlough.
- 14) Minimal amount of travel during furlough.

Combining their cooperative effort with the assistance of mission agencies, Partnership churches will have a more profound impact in their global ministry endeavors. If seven to ten churches would form a Partnership Program to completely fund the new missionaries, the missionary support raising could be realized in twelve months, burnout can be avoided, and the church would fulfill her divine obligation and responsibility as the church of Jesus Christ. Thus, the church grows, both at home and aboard.

B. Missionary Care Support Teams

Missionary Care Support Teams is a practical way for a sending church to biblically care for her missionaries. *“If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you do well, because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth”* III John 6-8. Missionaries are going out to champion the Name of God. If we love God’s glory, His Name, then we will love to see the flame of His Name spread to every unreached people. Therefore, those who go out from us must be seriously and substantially supported by those who stay behind. Isn’t this the reason we are staying behind, for the sake of the Name, not for the sake of comfort or convenience or money or any private ambitions?

A Care Team is a small group (6-12) of committed people who come together to care for their missionary in a variety of ways, striving to help meet their personal, emotional, and spiritual needs. It is a group of people with whom the missionary can be open and honest, allowing them to see his/her needs and share in his/her successes and defeats. This committed group will show practical love, keep the missionary visible before the rest of the congregation, and encouraged during prefield ministry. This care is not to stop when prefield ministry is completed. The Care Teams are designed to operate beginning with prefield ministry, during their term, and when they return on furlough. Care never stops.

- Team Formation

Members of a Care Team are prayerfully chosen by the individual missionary and the church Missions Committee. Missionaries may ask friends from their small groups, ABFs, various ministry involvements, etc., to come together to form their Care Team. The key for the missionary is to choose people with whom they have already established a level of trust and with

whom they can be “real”. The leader/directors in the Care Teams must be members of the church.

- Member Expectations

- 1) Term length. Commit to being on the Team for at least one year or preferably one missionary term.
- 2) Meet together on a regular basis, about once a quarter, to pray corporately for the missionary. Each member will pray daily.
- 3) Correspond regularly with the missionary, including sending birthday, anniversary, holiday cards, and general notes of encouragement.
- 4) Work to create an atmosphere where the missionary feels safe and comfortable to share himself/herself very personally with the Team – keeping confidential concerns confidential.
- 5) The Care Team is to be the first line of hospitality for the missionary when they are in the area. They will be called upon to help provide housing, meals, transportation, and other needs, as well as being available to help the missionary in his/her re-entry to the area and the church.
- 6) Actively participate in the prefield ministry by assisting the missionary in raising support. This would include sending mail outs, contacting churches/pastors for meetings, scheduling meetings, and going with the missionary to present his/her ministry.
- 7) Be available to provide practical care for the missionary.

- Organization

The church Missions Committee will have oversight of the Care Teams. The Missions Committee could recruit a Care Team Coordinator to have direct leadership over all the teams. The following are the specific director’s needed for a Team to be completely functional. Directors may serve as a married couple or single individual. All must be church members, and understand and support the church’s mission policy.

- 1) Team Leader – lead the Team in the care of the missionary of that Team, making sure the support of the church for the missionary is effective.
- 2) Prayer Director – communicates regularly and effectively the prayer requests and praises of the missionary to the Care Team and the entire church.
- 3) Hospitality Director – oversees the hospitality need of the missionary of the Care Team.
- 4) Communication Director – communicates regularly and effectively with the missionary, and relays information to the Care Team and the congregation.
- 5) Logistic Director – handles the “nuts and bolts” of the missionary’s on-going home responsibilities and needs while the missionary is away on the field.

The Coordinator and each of the Directors have a specific job description and responsibilities. For further resources on this concept, read “Serving As Senders”, by Neal Pirolo. Also, I have written a manual for Care Teams that grew out of Pirolo’s book and is available upon request.

- Implementation

- 1) Missions Committee read and study, “Serving As Senders” by Neal Pirolo.
- 2) After much discussion and prayer, write a Care Team Manual.
- 3) Enlist your missionaries to read book and manual, and enlisted their support.
- 4) Missionaries and Missions Committee recruit possible members for the missionary teams.
- 5) Give prospective Team members a book and manual to read.
- 6) Host a Saturday morning workshop/seminar to explain the Care Support Teams.
- 7) Ask for a commitment.

C. Missions Training and Discipleship

The purpose for a Missions Training and Discipleship (MTD) group is to provide edification, encouragement, accountability, and prayer support to those whom God is grooming

for global ministry. This would include veteran missionaries, prefield missionaries, and those within the church that have a heart and passion for reaching the unregenerate, locally and globally. MTD is especially designed to mobilize those who are on prefield ministry, as well as, train others who are seeking God's will for their life.

- Organization / Implementation

All that is required is a pastor, missions committee chairman, or individual in the church who has a passion for mobilizing people into service for the Lord. He would then recruit the support of the pastor and missions committee. Next, schedule the first gathering and promote it in the church. The first to recruit for the first meeting is the Missions Committee. MTD meetings should be held on a regular bases, perhaps four or five times a year. The best setting for small group meetings is in a home. Light refreshments would provide a nice touch, and encourage warm open communication. A good time to implement would be after a Missions Conference.

- Agenda

- 1) Inspiration. This would consist of a time of worship (adoration/praise) – singing, praises, and conversational prayer.
- 2) Instruction. Biblical training will grow from the Scriptures, missions articles, issues, and resources (videos, books, tapes, etc.) all pertaining to the call and practice of vocational ministry and Christian living.
- 3) Interaction. This is where the accountability takes place. Each participant will share their pressing decisions, subjects, new ideas they would like to discuss, challenges facing them, blessings received, plans for the next two months, and how they are feeling spiritually, emotionally, and physically. The group will make them accountable for all of this. This is a time of networking for growth.

4) Intercession. A time of prayer. Each answers the question, “What is the major need/concern you are presently facing? How can we pray for you?” then pray.

- Training Agenda Example

Missions Focus (instruction time)

- 1) *Theme*: How Does One Know When They Are “Called?”
- 2) *View Video* – “Called To Serve In Africa”
- 3) *Discussion*: What insights did you pick up from the video and missionaries that would involve the importance of knowing God’s call? How might God call you to His service using your talents/abilities/gifts?
- 4) *Missions Articles*: “Process To Become A Missionary” and “How To Prepare For Missionary Service” (handouts – discuss)
- 5) *Discussion Topic*: “The Call of God: How Can You Determine You Are Called?” Jeremiah 1:4-19. Handout and discuss paper on the Will of God.

The main thing to remember, you are seeking to provide edification, encouragement, accountability, and prayer support to the missionaries and future missionaries. Be as creative as you can, like inviting veteran missionaries to challenge them and answer questions, missionary debriefing in a group meeting with a returning missionary from the field, or a field trip to the City Mission for a compassion project.

The pastor would especially provide a great service to the prefield missionary if he were to meet with them privately, say over lunch in a restaurant, for a ‘life on life’ discipleship/mentoring relationship. This should take place every four to six weeks. Personal encouragement and exhortation will go a long way in getting the missionary to the field.

Concluding Thought: If the church would implement all three proposed improvements, the missionary would get to the field quicker and better prepared for a productive ministry.

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