

# Strategic Contributions of Seasoned Missionaries

January 2026

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## Introduction

The ongoing contribution of veteran missionaries is a topic close to my heart, as I believe they should be able to continue serving without feeling the need to retire or become sidelined. Having served in YWAM for over forty years, I know that I, too, am one of those older missionaries who still feel a strong calling to missions and believe there is much more I can contribute. At the same time, I wholeheartedly want to see the next generation of missionaries reach their full potential and step confidently into leadership roles.

For seasoned missionaries, mindset is everything. We are not here to cling to positions, compete with younger leaders, or stand in the way of new expressions of ministry. Rather, we desire to walk alongside the next generation, supporting, mentoring, empowering, and cheering them on and in prayer as they lead. We long to be present without overpowering, influential without controlling, and supportive without overshadowing.

Veteran missionaries bring a wealth of wisdom, emotional stability, and lived experience that can significantly strengthen the mission field and help build healthy, sustainable teams. Our role is not to hinder younger leaders, but to nurture, encourage, and contribute in ways that create continuity, resilience, and long-term fruitfulness in ministry for generations.

One book that has deeply shaped my thinking in this area is "*Who Cares about the Missionary?*" by Marjorie A. Collins. Drawing from her years of service in Pakistan and her reflections after returning home, Collins challenges churches and mission agencies to reconsider how they care for missionaries. While her primary focus in this book is member care, her reflections prompted me to think more broadly about how seasoned missionaries can continue to offer meaningful contributions to the organization and to younger missionaries. Their accumulated experiences, both successes and failures, are gifts to the missions. When stewarded well, they can strengthen, protect, and equip the generations that follow.

Instead of fully stepping aside or retiring from missions, older missionaries can assume roles of encouragement, discernment, mentoring, and support as they transition away from their formal positions. These roles allow the younger missionaries to lead effectively while ensuring that the valuable lessons of the past are preserved. Older missionaries are an irreplaceable gift, carrying wisdom, history, compassion, and spiritual depth that enrich the mission community and empower future generations.

## **Key Areas of Contribution for Older Missionaries**

### **1. The Anchor of Experience**

Decades of service in cross-cultural contexts provide a depth of understanding that cannot be gained quickly. Their lived experience, walking through successes, disappointments, transitions, and seasons of perseverance, provides a steady foundation for younger missionaries who are just beginning their journey.

The modeling of a consistent, faithful walk with God over many years is one of the most powerful legacies older missionaries offer. In a fast-paced world that values quick results, the testimony of endurance, obedience, and trust in God speaks loudly. Younger missionaries learn the rhythm of a consistent walk with God by watching those who have remained faithful through every season.

Older missionaries also bring cultural insights and historical perspective. Having navigated cross-cultural challenges, conflicts, and adaptations, they can help younger missionaries avoid unnecessary pitfalls and understand local contexts and their cross-cultural challenges. Their perspective, shaped over decades, offers wisdom that strengthens teams and helps the next generation become effective and resilient missionaries.

### **2. Mentoring and Discipleship**

The new generation of missionaries is not just looking for trainers; they are looking for authentic guides. They are seeking wisdom, authenticity, and safe relationships where they can process questions about calling, identity, leadership, and sustainability in ministry. This creates a significant opportunity for older missionaries to invest deeply in discipleship relationships.

Mentoring is one of the most effective ways to train younger leaders and release them into their highest potential. When done intentionally, it provides space for encouragement, accountability, affirmation, and honest feedback. Older missionaries can walk closely with younger leaders, helping shape their character, discernment, and leadership capacity.

Another valuable aspect of mentoring is advocacy. Over years of service, veterans often hold high levels of trust, credibility, and relationships with churches, leaders, and communities. By opening doors and making connections, they can help younger missionaries step into opportunities that might otherwise take years to build and access. Younger leaders thrive when they are supported by seasoned guides who believe in them and are willing to invest and stand with them.

### **3. Training and Equipping**

With years of experience, older missionaries are uniquely positioned to contribute through training and equipping recruits. While the world and methods of ministry continue to evolve, the foundational values of the mission remain the same. Older missionaries help safeguard these values while adapting wisely to new contexts.

Areas such as cross-cultural communication, conflict resolution, spiritual formation, leadership development, and team health are particularly strengthened by seasoned insight. Older missionaries can teach not only from theory, but from lived reality through their years of ministry experience.

In addition to in-person training, they can contribute through writing—articles, manuals, reflections, and books that capture lessons learned over time. These resources can serve as guiding tools for those in training and ensure that the “DNA” of the mission is preserved and passed on to future generations.

### **4. Advocacy and Organizational Insight**

Advocacy is one of the most significant contributions veteran missionaries can offer. Having lived in the field, they understand the real needs, pressures, and challenges faced by missionaries. They can speak with credibility to leaders, sending churches, and agencies because they have “been there” themselves.

Their voice is often trusted and heard, providing a bridge between field realities and organizational leadership. Older missionaries also carry a deep understanding of the organization’s ethos, values, and history. This enables them to offer wise counsel in decision-making processes and to help the organization remain aligned with its foundational calling while navigating change.

### **5. Member Care Strength**

Having served and led member care in YWAM for over thirty years, I have seen firsthand the vital role member care plays in helping missionaries thrive and remain healthy in ministry. Many seasoned missionaries desire to continue serving, and member care is an area where they often excel.

Drawing from years of personal experience, older missionaries are well-equipped to walk alongside staff who are experiencing stress, loss, transition, or burnout. They can offer a listening ear, prayer, emotional support, and wisdom gained through their own journeys. Their presence in both informal and formal debriefings brings depth, compassion, and stability.

Their long obedience, tested faith, and seasoned perspective uniquely strengthen member care ministries. They also play an important role in orienting new staff—helping them understand the culture, values, and rhythms of mission life.

Older missionaries are not obstacles to the next generation; they are anchors for the next generation of missionaries and the organization. When their strengths are intentionally welcomed into member care roles, the entire community benefits, and both generations are empowered to flourish together.

## **Conclusion**

Senior missionaries who choose to retire from their positional roles but not from their calling bring immeasurable value to the organization. Their extensive field experience, seasoned insight, and spiritual maturity are invaluable resources that enhance the collective wisdom of the organization and provide vital mentorship to emerging leaders. As their physical strength and capacity change, it is wise for them to adopt flexible and sustainable service models.

They can continue to contribute meaningfully through part-time or hybrid roles, onsite or online, with project-based responsibilities or seasonal involvement. As an organization, we should honor their legacy, welcome their voices, and intentionally foster continuity between generations in missions.

At the same time, there must be freedom to decide when it is time to leave the field and return to their home countries. Even then, many can continue mentoring, teaching, and offering support from where they are based. YWAM already embraces staff who serve from their home nations, providing further opportunities for older missionaries to remain engaged in meaningful ways.

Just as shepherd-leaders are called to preserve, protect, and develop those God has entrusted to them, older missionaries can continue serving by preserving the mission's values, protecting the well-being of its people, and developing the next generation of missionaries. When we intentionally honor and utilize the giftings of the seasoned missionaries, the mission community becomes stronger, healthier, and more fruitful for generations to come.

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