

## Introduction

One missionary told me since he arrived on the field no one had visited him. On occasion he and his team received letters from their field office. Most sending missions agencies and churches do not visit their missionaries. If they do visit their missionaries it is often for strategy rather than member care. This is not to say that they are at fault or do not care for their missionaries. The distance, travel time to remote areas, and finances makes such visit difficult and challenging.

Regular contacts between member care providers and missionaries are crucial for their effectiveness. We cannot neglect the missionaries who are serving in isolated areas. The apostle Paul never failed to encourage the believers wherever he went. Paul did not leave the disciples on their own for too long. He visited them whenever he could to encourage and build up the believers and leaders of the church. When he was in prison he would write to them.

Recently one of the member care providers asked me what he can do when he visit workers on the field. I thought about the years I was in South Asia where the focus of my member care was visiting church planters.

### What are the key issues frontline workers faced on the field?

What are some the struggles missionaries struggle with especially those in isolated locations? The list below is some of the struggles church planters shared with me when I was working in South Asia. The list is not an exhaustive list.

1. Isolation and loneliness due to sensitive locations where they are working. They have to be careful who they associate with to protect themselves and their contacts.
2. Rejection by local community and people whom they are trying to reach. Not everyone is ready or opened to hear the gospel. Rejection from community can sometimes be discouraging and demotivating.

3. Lack of respect from community for the single missionaries. The singles are being pressured by their family and community to get married. In the South Asia marriage and family is held with high regards. They view single people as “irresponsible” individual. This is because they think the singles do not have people whom they are responsible for.
4. Language and culture learning stress especially for those who are first timer. Missionaries need to learn the heart language of the local people.
5. Education of children. The foreign missionaries face the challenge of having their children in local schools. This is because of different educational system. The local missionaries who are working in tribal areas face the same problem.
6. Family commitments for the singles and eldest son of those from the majority world. There is an expectation for them to care for their parents who are advancing in age. In the majority world there is an expectation for children to care for their parents.
7. Maintaining healthy family relationships and balancing ministry responsibilities. This is an on-going struggle for many missionaries and full time workers. Every family needs to discuss what is best for their situation.
8. Inter-personal relationship conflict. Conflicts within team is a real issue and has been one of the key factors of missionary attrition. Team conflicts caused a lot of stress among missionaries.
9. Insufficient finances both for personal and ministry. It is a huge financial burden for some missionaries to go on furlough. For some of them there is an added financial constraint when they have to go on regular visa renewal. This added an extra pressure besides from their monthly support.
10. Visa. Having a viable visa as a role to keep them in the community is a high stress for all foreign missionaries. Many countries do not provide missionary visa.

11. Pressure to perform and produce results. Sending churches often do not understand the difficulties of the ground work. Churches may not demand for result there is the nagging pressure of needing to produce fruit. This is so that they can maintain their financial support.
12. Persecution. In recent years persecution is on the rise. Missionaries and their contacts are in constant threats of persecution. Some are facing persecution or the threat of arrest if they become Christian.
13. Health problems. Missionaries are not very good at self care. Many of them place ministries above their personal health. Some are sick due to poor hygiene or lack of nutritious food where they are serving.

## How can member care providers serve the workers while they visit them on their field location?

I was working as a member care provider in South Asia from 1993 to 2015. I set up a regular schedule to visit each church planting team on location at least once a year. Every six months the missionaries go to a central location for training. In this way the missionaries are not left alone for too long without outside contact and input.

The list below is some of the things I do when I go on field visit. Of course there are more things we can do depending on the culture, locations and the people we visit.

1. Listen to the worker. Missionaries serving in isolated areas find a great need to have someone to listen to them. They face challenges and struggles on the field. It helps to have someone who would listen to them without any bias.
2. Ask the hard questions. I have a close relationship with the missionaries and was able to ask the hard questions. If there is a warning sign then I would refer them for further help.

3. Encourage mutual care among teams members. Caring doesn't come from visiting member care providers. I encourage team members to care and look out for each other. Team also needs to learn to have fun together as a way to show love and care.
4. Encourage workers to have hobbies. Having a hobby is very important. Life is not just about ministry. I find having a hobby takes a person off stress because they are doing what they enjoy and find personal fulfillment.
5. Teach self care, some first aid and health tips. Self care is important because it is a key for longevity and staying resilient on the field.
6. Take them out for a meal. When fund is available, I try to take the team out for a meal or have a meal at their home when I visit them. I find this helps in team building and shows that we care.
7. Pray. Prayer is very important as member care providers. We need to support the missionaries believe with them for a breakthrough in what they do.

## Conclusion

On-field missionary care is providing visit for missionaries who are on the field. Member care providers cannot visit without providing care for them.

“The better the quality of our friendships, the less need there will be for counseling. And the better **all of** us listened to each other, the less need we'd have for therapy” (Cerlatic 2016:55).

Cerlatic's insight on relationships and listening to each other is what member care is about. People will need lesser counseling if they have friends who are willing to listen to them. Missionaries will not be in isolation if there is regular schedule on field visits for them.

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