

1. Your Relationship With Your Sending Church

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Sending Relationship

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”- Acts 13v1-3

In the book of Acts we see the strong and ongoing relationship between Paul, Barnabas and their home / sending church in Antioch. Their initial sending in Acts 13 is initiated by God and strongly supported by the leadership of the church. They return to the church to report on what God has done amongst them on a number of occasions (Acts 14v27, 18v22-23) including spending significant time back in Antioch (Acts 14v28).

All of this illustrates the vital importance of your relationship and ongoing partnership with your home / sending church.

“Here I am, send me”

The first thing that is vital to consider is whether the church is willing and able to be your sending base. We see from the examples from Acts above that Paul and Barnabas were fully committed to the church in Antioch and its leaders, and vice versa. They had formed deep relationships with the church over years, and so when the call came to go, the church and its leaders could wholeheartedly get behind them.

Sadly, there are times when this is not the case. This might be the result of someone expecting or demanding support from the church to help them fulfill their personal vision, and then being angered or disillusioned if the elders do not agree with this. The leaders may also be happy to act as the supporting and sending base in future, but not yet as their resources are already committed elsewhere.

If you choose to partner with a mission organisation or opt for an opportunity overseas that has no link to your church or its wider apostolic connections it makes it more likely that the church will bless you as you go, but not commit to an ongoing partnership as your sending base.

If, like Paul and Barnabas, you feel that God has called you to serve him in another culture at some point, it is therefore vital to:

- **Humbly serve the church where you are** – in whatever way is helpful! God gives grace to the humble, and the path to greatness is to become a servant
- **Build deep, genuine relationships in the church** – do not live as if you are “passing through” but give yourself to others and invest in them. Paul weeps when he says goodbye to the Ephesian elders illustrating his depth of relationship with them. Leaving should always be painful if we have built strong, meaningful relationships
- **Get to know and share openly with your elders** – the role of leaders in the church is both to shepherd those under their care, and equip them for works of service. Share with them what God has said to you, ask for and listen to their advice, seek to understand how and where they are already supporting world mission.
- **Seek to develop the experience and skills that you will need** – local churches provide an amazing training ground. It is far more likely that you will be successful on the mission field if you have already gained similar experience in your own culture.

Take Time to Reflect

1. How strong is your relationship with, and commitment to your sending church and its elders? What can you do to strengthen these relationships?
2. In what ways are you serving in the church? What skills and experience would be helpful to gain as you prepare for the future?
3. To what extent have you already spoken to the elders about what you feel God may have called you to do?

1.2 Changing Relationships and Accountability

Relationships and Accountability

When you are based in another country, a long way from your previous home, your relationship with your home church will be different. You will probably be working with a local team, with local leadership. Depending on the situation there, you may be part of a local church. How do your accountability relationships work in these situations?

The answer is that it will vary depending on the different circumstances. The most important principle is that there is clear and open communication between the different parties so that everyone is clear about their own and each other's responsibilities.

You may be going into a completely new, pioneering situation in which there is no local leadership. In this case, your sending church has an even greater level of pastoral support and input.

Even if your home church is happy to hand on some responsibility for you to local leaders, they remain your sending base. That means that they retain some degree of care for you, as well as a responsibility to support you in different and appropriate ways.

Some of the areas in which the church will support you will probably include:

1. **Moral** - providing encouragement, keeping in touch, verbal and other affirmation, simply making sure that there is a real, continuing relationship in place
2. **Logistics** - providing resources you need to perform your particular cross-cultural ministry
3. **Finance** - we will return to this in greater detail in another session
4. **Prayer** - corporate as the church gather to pray, in small groups of people with a special burden for you, and individual
5. **Communication** - about spiritual and mission related matter, but also about every day life
6. **Re-entry** - your sending church has a responsibility to ensure you are properly cared for on your return. You may need to ask for this as many churches are not yet fully aware of this need.

Questions to Consider (When You Know That You Are Going)

Once you know that you will be going, it is essential to discuss a number of areas with your sending elders before you go:

1. **Your mission.** There needs to be clarity and agreement about what you are going to do, what your vision is, what will happen when that vision is realised. What will happen if your goals are not reached?
2. **Lines of accountability** including all those with an interest or a role, for instance, local leaders, mission agency, apostolic team.
3. Any **pastoral concerns** you have about yourselves, your marriage, your family (those coming with you and those left behind).
4. **Communication** - how and how often you will be in touch with elders, and also with the church more generally in the form of newsletters or blogs. There is a different measure of communication needed with the elders as you keep them in touch with how you are doing, issues you are facing etc. You will not be sharing all of this with the church or even those who specifically support you. You will need to be clear about any issues of security in communication - any terms or topics that need to be avoided or 'encoded'.
5. **Prayer** - how you will be supported in prayer. Will there be a specific prayer group set up to pray for you regularly? Who will lead this and how will they receive the information they need?

6. **Financial support**- your elders need to see and help you assess your budget. Are they going to support you financially? If so, how much, how will this be paid and how often will it be reviewed? Is this commitment open-ended or for a limited season?
7. **Who will have a watch over your affairs in the UK?** Does anyone have power of attorney or access to your bank accounts, should the need arise?
8. **How often will you be returning home?** What will be the primary purpose of these visits? Will the church be able to provide assistance i.e. helping with accommodation, transport etc. Will you be given opportunities on these trips to speak to the church about your work?
9. **How often can you expect an elder or other leader to visit you in the field?**
10. **Crisis plan** - are your elders happy that you have a robust plan in place in case of a crisis? Do they have a role to play in that plan?
11. **Your long-term plans** - do you have an end date in mind? What are your plans if and when you return?

Take Action

1. If you know you are going and have not yet discussed these areas with your sending elders, arrange a time to do so. Make sure that you have prayerfully considered your answers to these questions before you meet with them.
2. If you have any concerns about your relationship with your home church or its elders, make sure you speak to someone your trust in leadership elsewhere to discuss these concerns

1.3 Sending Well

For Discussion With Leaders

These notes for leaders are adapted from a talk given by Ian Ashby, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, USA. Please pass this onto your local eldership team and ask to discuss it with them!

At New Frontiers Church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, we have had the privilege of sending a number of different people on overseas mission. Mostly to the Middle East. Some have gone for periods of training to learn a language and the culture, others are now living and working there, and are either involved in building and planting churches or looking to form teams who will work into more difficult areas. We have made mistakes, but through it we've learned a lot and are still learning as we go along.

I've known people who have not been sent well and who got really messed up. One couple were trained by a well known specialist missions organization, who were sending people to unreached people groups in remote areas. While not members of our church, they often

visited us when they were home from training and we had opportunities to pray for them. But when their training was completed, they were sent by the missions agency to a tribe in the mountains of N.Mexico and left to it. No real pastoral support, no apostolic oversight, no relationship. Just trained and parachuted in. The result was they really struggled and got badly burned by their experience. That's not what we want for the people we send. We can do better!

If you are a church leader and have a person or a couple who you believe to be called to overseas mission, there are two questions I would suggest need to be answered before sending them. And when I say "send", I'm talking about the church getting behind them, investing in them, making a commitment to them, where they become an extension of your mission together. We have had people who have left us from time to time to go overseas, because they want to work with YWAM or Heidi Baker, and we will bless them, we might pray for them one Sunday, even take up an offering, but I want to suggest that it is not the same as being sent - they are leaving with our blessing. If we are going to send someone, there are two questions that need to be answered - Assuming, that is, that we feel they are ready to go.

Q1 Who is providing apostolic oversight and strategic input to them or the situation they are going to?

More often than not, the apostolic oversight is not going to come from the sending church, unless it is an apostolic base. So, who is providing that, because if we truly believe in the foundational role that apostles and prophets play in mission, in planting and building NT churches, then we need to work in partnership with them. So before investing considerable time and resources into sending people, are we confident in what is being built, that it has our values? Do we have a relationship with those who are working apostolically into the situation?

There are so many good works that we could invest in, but we all have limited resources, so I want to invest wisely in something that has our values, that we can wholeheartedly get behind, where we can work in relationship, in partnership together, but also so we can be confident in what we are sending people to, because we want to send them well.

Q2. Is the sending church ready to send them out? Is the church really behind this? Has enough been done to envision the church about global mission?

Is it something that the body feels caught up in together, so it's not just the leaders sending them out, it's the church, because it needs the whole church involved, especially when it comes to financial support.

Assuming those things are in place. What are some of the practicalities involved in sending people well? If we are committing to send someone overseas, then I believe we have a responsibility to provide pastoral care and oversight, until such a time when, say, in a church planting situation, they may have their own elders, and even then the situation may require some form of ongoing care, when it's a cross-cultural context.

Five practical considerations:

1. Financial support

2. Preparing people to work cross culturally
3. A plan for communication when overseas
4. Prayer support
5. Re-entry support

1. Financial support

How are the people we are sending going to support themselves? Some may have jobs to go to, but many won't. If they are going to be living somewhere long term, then there may need to be a plan for finding work in that country to support them in the future. They may need a skill or an area of expertise they are going to go with, that will enable them to stay in the country, these things all need to be considered. But usually some financial support from home base will be needed in the beginning, and in some cases it might be an ongoing need.

In the traditional missionary model, it's the person being sent who is usually responsible for raising all their support, often with pledges of support from individuals and churches who sponsor them. But then they have to keep sending home encouraging reports and inspiring stories to keep the support coming. And when they do come home for a rest, it's not really a rest, because they have to do a tour of all the churches that are supporting them, so they don't get forgotten. Trying to raise your own funds and keep that support coming can be a massive burden.

But if the sending church is working with a person to raise the money, helping to oversee & co-ordinate the necessary financial support, regularly checking in to see if they are managing, then, as you can imagine, it relieves the person being sent of a great burden and releases them to focus on the work they've been sent to do. And then, when they do come back for a visit, they can rest.

The kind of financial support that is needed will vary from person to person. But one of the things we came to realize at New Frontiers Church is that if we are sending someone to live in a different culture where they need to learn the language, then we will probably need to support them for two years full time to get them to the point when maybe they could begin support to themselves. We came to this realization after sending our first couple to be part of a church planting team. The husband got a job teaching English, while at the same time doing language studies. But to earn enough money to support his family meant working long hours with a long commute, it was exhausting. It meant he made slow progress in learning the language and was unlikely to get a better job without it. We learned from that. The next couple we sent, we sent to a language school in the Arabian Peninsula full time for two years. After two years we had them come back to States so we could pray together and plan with them what the next step should be. We've found that to be helpful, to make an initial two year commitment, then at the end of two years, review and pray with those who were sent about the next step.

Obviously, supporting people for two years is quite a financial undertaking. For us it has meant taking up a big annual offering for overseas missions. We have also asked people to consider pledging a monthly amount on top of their tithe to support a particular couple. We get our community groups involved, do fundraising events. We want to get the whole

church involved and help them to see, it's not just this couple who are involved in overseas mission, we all are! We are all involved with them, in reaching the nations.

This also means meeting with those who are being sent to help them get their own finances in order and to make sure they are playing their part too - clearing debt, saving money where possible. It means helping creating a budget for living overseas, **and of course it doesn't end once they have gone**, there needs to be a regular review of budget and needs, things like taxes, health care, insurance. At New Frontiers Church we have one of our elders who oversees our finances have regular Skype calls with our overseas workers to make sure that these things get talked about.

2. Preparing them to work cross culturally

My wife and I moved from the UK to the US a number of years ago. When we were preparing to come, we never considered doing cross cultural training. But a businessman in church insisted and paid for us. It was so helpful. Even between English speaking nations there are big cultural differences that we need to be aware of, or at least go with the right expectations and a desire to learn. We now provide training for all those that we send. As you may know, the Newfrontiers family of churches have now developed their own training, "From the Nations to the Nations", which we make a requirement for those we are sending. We have also sent people for training with specialist groups who deal with particular cultures, like the Islamic world.

We also recommend some counseling. It is helpful to ask questions to try and uncover any potential weaknesses - emotional issues, character issues or any sin that needs to be dealt with. We want to make sure marriages and relationships are in a good place, that they don't have issues with authority and so on. All these things will be tested when people go overseas on mission. Spiritual warfare is very real. Sadly, we have seen people come back who have got hurt and needed counseling afterwards. You can't prepare for everything. Some things only really become apparent when put under pressure. But if we are going to send well, then we really need to take time to help people prepare well.

3. Plan for Communication

We've come to realize what a massive difference good communication can make. Regular communication with the sending church can be a life-line to people being sent out.

When we send people out, it is so easy to then forget about them, out of sight out of mind. We get busy in church life and then one day when we do remember them, and try to make contact, it's often very haphazard, the time differences can be a challenge, and so on.

There has to be a specific plan for communication, like skyping at a certain time every two weeks. Someone should be appointed to be responsible for this. Preferably someone understands the pressures of living abroad.

Each person we send has a mentor, or mentoring couple, who will encourage, ask questions and who will let the elders know how things are going, what the needs are, what we need to be praying for. We also plan on one of the elders making a strategic visit, usually once a year. And if there are difficulties, and we have faced some along the way, such as a serious break down in relationships, then we have had to be prepared to fly out

at a moment's notice and have funds put aside for that because some things can only be dealt with face to face.

We also encourage people that we send, not to return home in the first two year period unless there is an emergency. It is very hard to get settled in a new culture if someone is looking back to where they have come from. It is important to be able to fully immerse oneself in the new culture and build new memories and relationships before making a visit back to one's home country.

There also need to be periodic communication between the sending church and whoever is responsible apostolically for the work, to make sure that everyone is on the same page, and working in partnership together.

4. Prayer Support

Probably the most underestimated and most important thing of all. You have only got to read the biographies of the missionaries of old to see how true that is.

This is where I am very grateful for a couple in our own church who have spent time overseas as a family, helping plant churches in Mexico and Belgium. They know from personal experience the importance of having people praying for you. They asked to start a weekly prayer group. Every Monday night they and others meet to specifically pray for those we have sent out. Nothing encourages me more than that. It's hard to estimate the effect it's had, but I can tell you they have seen many specific answers to their consistent praying. And what an amazing encouragement that is, especially to those who are overseas, who feel so loved & cared for and supported in this way.

But we don't want prayer restricted to a small group of people who are in the know. It is important that the people we send out are kept before the whole church. So the times when we gather the whole church to pray, we will often end by praying for our people overseas. In our Sunday meetings we will also show video messages from them, so we will pray then too. And there have even been occasions when we will have them live on Skype. Like when we had baby dedications, and one of our couples overseas had just had a baby, so we had them join our Sunday meeting on the big screen, along with the other parents who were there, so they could be included in the dedications. We want everyone to know, we are a family on mission together.

Prayer has been the main way that we have been able to keep the church envisioned and involved in our mission overseas. But its obviously also vitally important for our overseas workers, and essential if we are going to send them well.

5. Re-entry Support

Finally, we come to the area which is often overlooked. Just as we support people in preparing for and carrying out cross-cultural mission, it is vital that we help them as and when they return. In scripture the apostle Paul returns to his sending base at Antioch on several occasions and if we genuinely want to be an NT apostolic movement we must expect to receive people back and re-integrate them into our churches at the appropriate time.

It is often assumed that “coming home” will be both easy and exciting for people, but this is usually not the case. This can be a very challenging time as they return to a church, city and culture that will feel both very familiar, but also completely different given the changes that have taken place in the time they have been away. They are likely to go through a degree of reverse culture shock, be unsure of their identity and how they fit within the church, as well as going through a process of grieving what they have left behind.

This process of re-entry support needs to begin before they return, with discussions needing to begin regarding how they feel about returning, where they will live, what work they might undertake, as well as the many practicalities associated with relocating from one country to another. Discussion may also be needed whoever has been providing apostolic input, as well as their local situation about what support will be provided by whom. The church also need to be prepared for their return in order that they may be welcomed and re-integrated well.

Upon their return, it is helpful to continue to apply the four previous points, providing ongoing financial, emotional, practical and prayer support for a period of time, which may last for many months. Regular debriefing and times to reflect on and review their time overseas are likely to be very helpful both for them, and for the local church as you seek to learn and improve upon how to best send and support people well.

(Note – point 5 added by Simon Brown, August 2016)