

# Evaluating Your Missionaries: When, Why and How

By Mike Pollard

As the Director of Church Ministries for a mission agency, requests for evaluations of missionaries routinely cross my desk. I greatly appreciate a church's desire to evaluate its missionaries. In fact, ACMC may be to "blame" for the numerous requests that come to mission agencies. Back in the 1980s ACMC began encouraging churches to increase their missionary care efforts and to work jointly with mission agencies in evaluating missionaries. It became somewhat en vogue to request missionary evaluations from missionaries or their agencies.

Yet I receive the same evaluation from the same churches year after year. I respond to their request and rarely if ever hear anything, even a "thank you", from churches. I can't help but wonder what happens with these reports once I've mailed them back. Who reads them? What, if anything, is done with them?

From a theological standpoint, I hold the local church in high esteem as to its role in world evangelization. When operating ideally and in optimal circumstances, I believe that mission agencies are truly parachurch organizations, tools in churches' hands. Yet my next statement may surprise you. While I believe that every church is called to give missionary care, not every church is positioned to evaluate its missionaries.

Let me differentiate between missionary care and missionary evaluation. We're providing missionary care when we demonstrate our concern for our missionaries by praying for them, informing them of news back home, encouraging them, resourcing them, supporting them financially, and even providing pastoral care such as counseling and shepherding. Missionary evaluation, on the other hand, is a step beyond missionary care. This is where a

local church plays a part in evaluating how the missionary is performing in his/her job.

While all churches should care for their missionaries, in my opinion and as a rule of thumb, the job of evaluating their effectiveness should probably be left to churches that have significantly invested in the missionary's ministry, i.e., 25% or more of his/her total support. Missionaries usually do not have the time to respond to an in-depth evaluation from ten different supporting churches. If your church provides less than 25% of a missionary's total support, consider asking if the missionary would send your church a copy of an evaluation that he already fills out for a church that supports him more substantially.

The next question an evaluating church should ask is where to send the evaluation. Some churches ask the missionary to fill out the evaluation. Other churches ask the agency (and most often the missionary's direct supervisor) to fill it out. The supervisor will most likely give you the best overview of the missionary's work. If you ask the supervisor to do the evaluation, I'd encourage you to copy the missionary on any correspondence, thus avoiding the appearance of secrecy. Perhaps you will want to ask for the same evaluation from both the missionary and his supervisor.

What kinds of evaluative questions should a church ask its missionaries? Let me answer that by telling a true story. Margie, my predecessor, once received a call from a distraught missionary. The missionary had received an evaluation questionnaire from a home church, and one question was quite personal and highly inappropriate. When Margie called the church, she wisely asked the missions pastor, "Is this a question that you ask of your pastoral staff and elders?"



It wasn't, and the missions pastor got the point. Hold your missionaries only to standards to which you're willing to hold your church's leaders.

Another issue to consider as you think about questions to include is whether or not your church is prepared to address any problems that surface. You may ask how a missionary couple's marriage or children are doing, but what if they tell you that their marriage is struggling, or that their child is rebelling? What are you prepared to do with that information? If you're not willing to intervene and be a part of the solution, then you're not prepared to ask the question.

Your evaluation questions ideally should fit on the front of one page, and should change each year at least slightly, so as to avoid the appearance that you send out forms and don't really read them. And if your church requests such a report, it's only right to respond to it. If the report surfaces issues that need to be addressed, investigate further and develop a plan for correcting the problem. It's also appropriate to tell your missionary the audience with which the report will be shared. Missionaries would answer quite differently if a small missions committee, whose members they know, will read the report as compared to if the letter will be read aloud in the church-wide weekly prayer meeting.

Next, churches should consider the issue of security as they evaluate missionaries. The mission agency for which I work sends many missionaries to restricted access countries. They could face arrest and expulsion if they received some of the questions that have come to me, such as, "How many people have you led to Christ in the past twelve months? Shared Christ with? How many people are you currently discipling?" For this reason, in the case of missionaries in security-conscious settings, it is best for churches to send their evaluations to the agency, and allow the agency to re-write your questions if necessary, so as

to ensure that your missionary will not be endangered.

Finally, what questions should be included in your evaluation? The best ones I've seen are questions that are open-ended, are genuinely inquisitive (vs. provocative) and allow the evaluator to elaborate in her answers. Here are some of the better questions I've seen on missionary evaluation questionnaires:

1. Please succinctly state your team's ministry vision, your strategy to fulfill the vision, your role in that strategy, and what you are attempting to accomplish.

2. What would success look like for you and how will you know when you have achieved it?

3. What do you see as possible obstacles that your team, you or your strategy face for the following year? What plans have you made or how might you plan to deal with them?

4. Are you currently experiencing conflict with other missionaries or your agency? (Answer will be kept confidential)

Here are some of the poorer questions I've seen:

1. Why should (name of church) support you?

2. Do you have a strong work ethic in ministry? Are you merely staying busy or are you working effectively to build God's Kingdom?

Missionaries need to be evaluated in their work as much as do engineers, teachers, investment managers and construction workers. I applaud churches that want to take part in this process and are rightfully in the position to do so. I encourage such churches to think carefully through what they want to ask and what they plan to do with the responses they receive.

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