

Partners in the Gospel

Calvary International Fellowship surrounds missionaries with Care Teams

“Having been a missionary on the field is what drives my desires to give our missionaries excellent care,” says Dain Wadley, pastor of Calvary International Fellowship (CIF), a church of 65 in San Diego. Wadley and CIF missions pastor Jeff Jackson both served as church planting missionaries in the Philippines, and both faced issues that solid missionary care from churches back home could have helped solve.

As CIF began to send out home grown missionaries, the church immediately opted against delivering missionary care through the traditional avenues, such as small groups or Sunday School classes “adopting” missionaries. “We wanted to have more personal and church-wide involvement with our missionaries,” says Wadley.

What CIF established were Care Teams. It now requires that missionaries claiming CIF as their home church assemble a Care Team before departing for the field. Staff members are not eligible to serve on Care Teams, in order to involve as many laypeople in missions as possible. Today CIF supports five missionary units serving in Latin America and Asia. Four units are “homegrown” and each has a Care Team.

A Care Team ideally consists of a minimum of four people. One coordinates the team; one handles prayer requests and farms them out to the church. A third person oversees logistics for the missionary, including packaging and mailing items. A fourth member manages the missionary’s prayer letter by printing and mailing it and updating the mail list. Positions on the team can vary depending on the missionary’s location and needs.

Care teams back home tend the missionary lifeline

"What is the greatest crime in the desert?"

"Finding water and keeping silent."

-Arab proverb



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Examples of CIF Care Teams' ministry are several. CIF sent one single male missionary to serve in Kotuna*. While there, he met and married a Kotunan woman. Neither CIF pastor was free to attend the wedding in Kotuna, but two of the missionary's Care Team members made the trek to attend the wedding. Furthermore, this missionary and his new wife will soon be returning for their first home ministry assignment. Their Care Team is now planning how to help the Kotunan wife ease into her first visit to the US.

One missionary couple needed four new tires and lacked the money for them. They asked their Care Team if they could find the funds. The Team began praying and within two days, a surprise source came forward with the money.

No limits are placed on what missionaries can ask of their Care Team, but it is also understood that a Care Team can not necessarily meet every need. On occasion a missionary will present a need and the Care Team is available to meet a part of the need. "I can't remember a time when a missionary has ever asked for anything inappropriate," says Wadley. "I think that's because they don't want to damage the relationship."

Ed Campean is a CIF missionary to Mexico and a recipient of the ministry of a Care Team. "Serving in Tijuana, only 35 minutes south of California, we wondered about the need for a Care Team for our family. Yet now as we approach our second anniversary on the field, we rejoice and thank God for CIF and its requirement that we build a Care Team. We are spiritually and emotionally much healthier than we would have been without the Care Team.

"When my son struggled through his first months on the field, our Care Team was in deep prayer and we saw God work through it. When we had a financial setback, our Care Team helped us solve it. One Care Team member in charge of our prayer letter took it upon herself to find a less expensive alternative to the printer we were using. Our Care Team leader has come down to relieve us when we needed it and allowed God to refill and refresh us to get back into the battle.

"The benefits we receive from Care Teams are beyond measure and we have a feeling of intimacy with the congregation. We see CIF as a partner in ministry rather than merely as a church to whom we mail ministry updates and from whom we expect a support check."

The benefits of Care Teams flow in both directions. Members of CIF are able to use their practical skills and spiritual gifts, thus making a difference on the mission field.

"If we, a church of 65 people, can give our missionaries Care Teams, then any church can do it!" says Wadley. He offers two suggestions for setting up Care Teams:

1. Make it part of your missions policy to require outgoing homegrown missionaries to recruit their own Care Teams. This ensures that the people responsible for their care will be people who know them at least relatively well.
2. Train your Care Teams. At CIF's first training meeting, a pastor or missions committee member explains to the team what the ministry entails. At the second meeting, the group discusses Neal Pirollo's *Serving as Senders*.

*Kotuna is a fictional name for a restricted access country in Asia.

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Bethlehem Baptist Church "sends them on their way in a manner worthy of God"

In 3 John 6b-8 John adjures believers to "send them [fellow believers spreading the gospel] on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the name.... Therefore we ought to support such ones, that we may be fellow workers in the truth." Bethlehem Baptist Church (BBC) in Minneapolis, MN claims this as its Biblical mandate for surrounding its missionaries with Barnabas Teams. It states further, "If we love God's glory, then we will love to see the fame of His name spread to every unreached people. And those who go out from

us for the sake of the Name will therefore be seriously and substantially supported by those of us who stay behind.”

Largely due to consistent missions-minded pastoral leadership over the past several years by Dr. John Piper, today BBC financially supports more than 70 missionary units, the majority of which are “home grown.” More than 100 more people are in the missionary preparation pipeline, desiring eventually to be sent out by the church. Realizing that its foreign missions committee can not give adequate missionary care to these swelling numbers, BBC has for some time required that missionaries recruit a Barnabas Team before they can be sent out.

A Barnabas Team (taken from the Barnabas mentioned in Acts 9:27 and 11:22-26) is a small group of 6-12, recruited by an outgoing missionary, usually from the ranks of the missionary’s relationships developed through small groups, Sunday School classes, ministry involvement and other avenues. Not all Barnabas Team members must be BBC attendees, but the majority should be.

At BBC, Barnabas Teams strive to meet missionaries’ spiritual, physical and emotional needs. While Teams may choose to meet some financial needs (such as that of producing the missionary’s prayer letter), their purpose is minimally financial. Missionaries with one-time or ongoing financial needs direct such needs to the missions committee.

Members of Barnabas Teams commit to serving on a Team for at least a year and preferably for the length of a missionary’s term. They meet every 2-4 weeks to pray for their missionary and coordinate any needed assistance.

“The composition of a Barnabas Team varies depending on the missionary, and the gifts and passions of those he recruits for the Team,” notes Jan Korbel, Coordinator for Barnabas Support Teams. “For example, the needs of a couple working at a school in Europe for missionary kids will be different than those of a single woman working in remote Africa.” Typically, however, a Barnabas Team’s positions minimally include the following:

1. A **BBC Contact Person** serves as a liaison between the church and the missionary. This person facilitates the missionary’s involvement or representation at church missions events and provides the church with current information about the missionary, for prayer or announcement purposes.
2. A **Meeting Facilitator** coordinates the Team’s regular meetings, setting an agenda and keeping the group on course.
3. A **Team Organizer** attends to necessary details related to the Team’s work. For example, she tracks the missionary’s prayer requests and answers to prayer, and makes sure that cards and gifts are sent at appropriate times.
4. A **Communication Person** handles all incoming and outgoing communication between the missionary, the Team and the church, especially items such as urgent prayer requests.

The remaining Team members are usually responsible for specialized or occasional tasks (such as producing prayer letters, managing a website for the missionary, or coordinating short-term trips in conjunction with the missionary).

Some BBC Barnabas Teams have gone so far as to go on or facilitate a short-term trip to visit their missionaries and do a project for them. For example, one Barnabas Team sent a team to a BBC missionary family serving on the Arabian peninsula. In their country is annually held a conference for all missionaries serving in that region. The BBC team went to put on a Vacation Bible School for the children of the missionaries attending the conference. The team also went on prayer walks through the country.

“We chose to deliver missionary care through such Teams, as opposed to Sunday School classes or small groups, because we wanted to make sure that everyone on the Team is someone who knows the missionary well,” says Korbel. “This insures committed involvement. Sometimes when a class or small group signs up to ‘adopt a missionary’ whom the group doesn’t know, many in the group don’t know the missionary and don’t get involved.”

Barnabas Teams have operated quite well at BBC for 18 years. One foundational factor has been particularly pivotal to their success. “Our pastor carries the torch for the cause of our people living a World Christian lifestyle,” says Korbelt.

For the church considering starting a Barnabas Team-type ministry, Korbelt offers the following suggestions:

1. Tell your missionaries early in their process of preparing to serve that they will need to recruit such a team. Give them plenty of time to assemble the team.
2. Provide some basic training for your care teams and provide creative suggestions for how they can fulfill their role.
3. Jump in and don't feel like you have to do it all perfectly. Provide such a care team for just one missionary then recruit other care teams later by promoting the success of your first care team.

Jan Korbelt is a Resource Consultant at Desiring God Ministries. You can e-mail her at jan@desiringgod.org. Learn more about BBC's Barnabas Teams by visiting www.bbcmpls.org/foreignmissions/MissionSupportTeams.html.

Church of the Saviour gives its missionaries a Home Team Advantage

“Several years back, our missions leadership team had a subcommittee of folks who gathered information about how our missionaries were doing on the field,” says Ken Davis, a member of Church of the Saviour (COS) in Wayne, PA. “Ostensibly, our mandate was missionary care. Yet we began to realize that this approach was very reactive. Actually, we were looking more for what was going wrong in their lives. We began to understand the need for proactively caring for missionaries at every phase of their career.”

Davis, a psychology professor at Villanova University in suburban Philadelphia, began working with COS' then-missions pastor to develop a comprehensive local-church based

plan for missionary care. What evolved is today called COS' Home Team Advantage.

The structure of the Home Team Advantage is only slightly altered from the system described and diagrammed in *Doing Member Care Well* (William Carey Library, 2002), edited by Kelly O'Donnell. The most powerful and important care that any missionary receives is **God's Care (Master Care)**. “...everything a missionary needs for life is available through Jesus Christ. However, through fellow believers, missionaries should expect to have some of their burden carried and their needs met. God will do this through His Church.”¹ (cf. Gal. 6:2)

Thus the next level of missionary care is that of **Church (or Sender) Care**. At COS this care features four facets, including:

1. **Missions Care Team.** This is a subcommittee of the larger Missions Leadership Team and oversees all care for all COS missionaries. This group prays for missionaries, evaluates their ministries, trains and supervises advocates and home teams, identifies resources for missionary care and seeks to build relationships with missionaries as possible.
2. **Advocate.** This is a missionary's friend in the church, recruited by the missionary as he prepares to leave COS for the field. The advocate serves as the liaison between the Missions Care Team and the missionary on the field, bringing information and needs to the Care Team's attention. He prays for the missionary, promotes the missionary among his circle of influence, leads the missionary's home team and corresponds with the missionary.
3. **Home Team.** This is a group of friends whom the missionary recruits as he prepares to leave COS for the field. A Missions Care Team is designed to be a group of problem solvers. When a missionary contacts the church (usually the Missions Care Team) with a need, the Home Team moves into action, identifying resources that will bring solutions to the need. Home Team members are often people whom the missionary has met through

his small group or Sunday School class.

4. **Specialist Care.** Specialists are people, some within the church and some outside the church, who are willing to use their unique skills for COS missionary care. For example, a COS missionary may begin to have financial difficulties, yet no one on his Home Team is well versed in finances. A specialist might be a professional financial planner who attends COS and has volunteered her services when the need arises.

Specialists present in many congregations, who could be tapped to assist missionaries, would include professionals such as counselors, doctors, dentists, technology experts (for e-mail, website and encryption issues), lawyers and financial planners. But specialists can also be people who have everyday skills. For example, notes Davis, some COS members have volunteered to serve as “shoppers” or “orienters.” When a missionary returns home after two or three years on the field, often much change has occurred. Choices at the grocery store have proliferated and need to be navigated. Returning missionaries have been appreciative to “orienters” who have shown them how to pay at the gas pump, or get through the grocery’s computerized self check-out line.

Specialists play a key role in missionary care. Yet a serendipity of this system is that people in the church who would not go for a week on a short term trip, or who would not serve on the missions committee, or who might not even be interested in missions, have an opportunity to use their skills in a way that brings them into contact with missionaries, and thus missions. The commitment is periodic and not demanding. Such a taste of missions can lead to more involvement down the road.

The outer layer of missionary care is that of **Network Care.** This refers to care given by outside sources, such as other missionaries on the field, or the mission agency, combined with the local church’s efforts.

COS is relatively early in the process of fully implementing the Home Team Advantage. The church supports 80 missionary units (singles or families). Of these units, nine are retired. Responsibility for their COS-provided care is designated to the Missions Care Team (subcommittee of the Missions Leadership Team). Another 20 units do not claim COS as their home church. Their home churches are theoretically responsible for their missionary care, though COS attempts to provide care to them however possible when they are back home. Another 20 units who claim COS as their home church are cared for by actively-functioning “Home Teams.”

Those homegrown missionaries who left for the field before the Home Team Advantage began are expected to develop Home Teams when they return to the US for home assignment. The remaining 40 or so units are at different phases of recruiting their “Home Team.” Some are missionaries who have been on the field for decades. Their long-standing relationships in the church informally resemble a Home Team.

While COS is a larger church with many resources, Davis encourages all churches to determine what care they can proactively provide for their missionaries. “We are called to go or send, and those back home are obligated to send. And that includes missionary care,” he notes. Many parachurch organizations and Christian professionals stand ready to assist local churches in the process of missionary care, if the church will investigate and identify them. “Maybe you don’t have a counselor or a doctor in your church. But you may have a computer specialist or a dentist. Figure out a way to offer what you do have as missionary care.”

Ken Davis teaches at Villanova University in suburban Philadelphia and serves on Church of the Saviour’s missions committee. You can e-mail him at kenneth.davis@villanova.edu. Visit COS on the web at www.cosnet.org.

¹ Davis, Ken, *The Home Team Advantage: a Developmental Approach to Missionary Care*, p. 4