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Member Care For African Mission Personnel

Africa is geographically vast with great ethnic diversity. It has over 50 countries and covers an area of about 30,000,000 square kilometers. The population is about 650,000,000, or roughly 10% of the world's population. Africa is the continent with the highest growth rate. It is estimated that by 2025, Africa will be home to over 15% of the world's people. Africa has over 3,000 ethno-linguistic people groups who speak at least 1,995 languages. There are four main and official languages: English in 22 countries, French in 18 countries, Spanish in four countries, and Portuguese in one country. Six countries use an African language as their official national language.

Africa has an abundance of natural and human resources, yet no other continent in the world has suffered such a series of natural, political, and economic disasters. Food production over the past 30 years has been on the decline and has been unable to keep pace with the rapid population growth. As a result, several places on the continent have had and still suffer from acute famine. As rich and well-endowed as this continent is, 32 of the 40 poorest nations in the world are there. Africa generates only 1.2% of the world's total earnings. Other factors affecting the African economy include corrupt government policies, foreign debts, and unending senseless wars that have claimed millions of innocent lives.

Into this context, the African church has, in spite of the odds, continued to forge forward sacrificially. Much has happened to God's glory, through both African and non-African mission personnel. But as we look at how the work has been done, we see the lamentable need to have managed our human resources better. Thankfully, I believe this situation is changing.

Africa is a fascinating continent, rich in natural resources and abounding in cultural diversity. It is also a continent which wrestles with incapacitating problems: widespread HIV/AIDS, poverty, war, famine, financial and government corruption, and minimal infrastructures for health care and social services. In the midst of its beauty and its bleakness, the Lord is stirring the church to raise up and send out mission workers. As with any new mission movement, the African sending groups are having to come to terms with the need for ongoing supportive resources to sustain their workers. This article addresses some of the current realities in African missions, focusing on some of the main needs and resources for member care.

For example, the Association of Evangelicals of Africa (AEA) was founded in 1966 with the purpose of “fostering unity and cooperation among evangelicals in Africa for the furtherance of God’s kingdom.” The AEA at the initial stages began two commissions that have helped make a difference: the Theological and Christian Education Commission (TCEC) and the Evangelism and Missions Commission (EMC). The TCEC straightway founded two theological institutions for the purpose of training ministers and other Christian workers. The EMC initiated a missions training program and also began helping churches and mission agencies to develop their own missions training programs.

With this background in mind, we now approach the subject of member care of African mission personnel. I will look at training and selection issues, family and MK issues, MK education, physical health, spiritual warfare, and some ways forward for African missions. The various case studies that I use are all true, although the names mentioned are fictitious.

Training and Selection

Indigenous mission societies that sprang up as offshoots of Western missionary efforts in Africa either saw little need for relevant missionary training or did not have the know-how to prepare their staff adequately before sending them out to the mission field. The practice was to send everybody who had a call for ministry—regardless of the nature of the ministry—to a Bible school for training, where available. In most cases, the students of the Bible schools and seminaries were equipped for pastoral work in organized church denominations, rather than in the rugged missionary work which the African mission field demands. The effect was that Christian workers who were trained in Bible schools plunged into missions and were ill equipped for the challenges they faced on the field.

A large denominational church in the central African region was jolted into the

practical reality of the need for effective pastoral care. One of its trusted, proven, and reliable workers was sent out as a missionary but had to return home, devastated, broken, and possibly never to go back to the field. Recently, a member of the mission board was asked to attend the AEA/EMC Member Care Consultation that took place in Cameroon in July 2001 (described more fully later). As you can imagine, the board member was very eager to learn more about member care, and he brought back many insights into what needs to be done to sustain missionaries on the field. He told me that this missionary had never received any form of training to prepare him and his family for what they would face on the field. It was assumed that he was sufficiently prepared, since he had known the Lord and served in the church as a worker for years. That was a costly mistake.

Another participant at the Consultation, from a French-speaking country, recalled with sadness how he had gone through Bible school training without ever having been asked at the point of entry if he had been born again or had had a conversion experience in the Lord Jesus Christ. The choice of students enrolled for training in that denomination in preparation for ministry, including missionary work, was never based on a conversion experience or on a conviction of a call into ministry. In some denominations, it is based on the pastor’s recommendation (who was trained through the same process) and on the candidate’s educational qualifications. Depending on his qualifications, a candidate, after training, is either employed as a pastor with a parish or as an evangelist to assist the pastor, or he is posted to a remote village for church planting. In many parts of Africa, pastoral ministry is regarded with the highest esteem, but in general this is not the case with missions ministry.

The new sending agencies in Africa, mostly from the Pentecostal background as a result of the charismatic revival in the institutions of higher learning, were mod-

eled after the faith missions of the early European missions. These African missions, like their predecessors, did not grasp the need for training or for the patient, careful selection of the missionary candidates. Many of these new sending agencies were being led by directors who themselves did not go through any form of training to prepare and equip them for their work, especially in cross-cultural settings. Most agencies did not require any form of training, but rather saw the training period as a waste of time, while souls were perishing in heathen lands. They felt that all that missionaries needed was a knowledge of the Bible, to be able to tell sinners that Jesus loves them and that He came to save them from their sins. Armed with this Bible knowledge, Christian workers moved out in faith.

Out of zeal to send many hundreds of workers to mission fields in and around Africa, some agencies have recruited indiscriminately, without reference to individual qualifications or the home church and without relevant missionary training. Many missionaries have gone out not only without the necessary skills, but also without adequate field supervision, mentoring, and appropriate care. In fact, in some cases missionaries went out by themselves to unreached and very difficult areas.

This approach has done more harm than good. Some of these untrained missionaries crashed woefully and returned home broken. Others who managed to weather the storms and who stayed on “spoiled” the work and shut the door to subsequent mission efforts among the people groups they served.

Positive Changes

After many faltering steps, the mission enterprise in Africa over the years has looked back in retrospect to see the “pot-holes” into which they stumbled and fell, and they have taken far-reaching measures in ensuring that the mistakes of the past are corrected. At least in the areas of training and selection, many mission agencies are now not only looking into the area of

relevant cross-cultural training, but they are also seeking to work with church leaders to ensure that the right people are selected, trained, sent out to the field, and supported. Working together, churches are now relying on the recommendations of the training institutions to determine whether or not candidates are suitable, the type of ministry in which they will likely be most effective, and whether or not they are likely to thrive in a pioneering situation. It is a slow process, because some African church pastors do not yet see missions as the priority of the church, but we are progressing!

The EMC of AEA initiated a missionary training program in the early 1990s called the School of Missions Eastern Region (SOMER), in which key trainers were further equipped to go back to their home countries to start schools of missions. At least 18 missionaries were trained to be trainers. This was very effective, and as a result of the EMC initiative, many schools of missions sprang up. African sending countries are putting a lot of effort now into training their missionaries and especially into preparing and equipping them for the harsh realities of the African mission fields. For instance, the main sending countries, such as Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, South Africa, and Kenya, now have training schools for missions. Here are some examples:

- Agape School of Missions for Training in Discipleship and Missions – Nigeria
- Calvary Ministries (CAPRO) School of Missions – Nigeria
- Nigerian Evangelical Missionary Institute (NEMI) – Nigeria
- Christian Missionary Foundation – Nigeria
- Foursquare School of Missions – Nigeria
- Sheepfold Ministries Missions Training – Kenya
- Africa Inland Missionary Training – Kenya
- World Mission Center – South Africa

- Ecole de Mission Inter-Africain au Benin – Republic of Benin
- Adonai International Missions School – Central African Republic (CAR)
- CERFEM – Chad
- Ghana Evangelical Missionary Institute – Ghana

The development of better training, to some extent, has served to reduce the occupational hazards of African missions. Churches with genuine and authentic missionary thrusts, which have hitherto used only their Bible schools to prepare their missionaries, have been able to take advantage of these new missions training centers to better train and equip their workers.

In August 1996, the AEA TCEC and the EMC jointly organized a workshop on missions training in Africa, held in Jos, Nigeria. Those who were invited to attend were theologians, primarily from accredited theological schools, along with missionaries involved in training from 10 different African countries and the United Kingdom. The workshop centered on the need for integration between missions and theology. It emphasized that in order for Africans to be won to the Lord Jesus Christ, “It is not only necessary to encourage enthusiastic Africans into missions, but also to give them solid, biblically based theological foundations for that mission.” A careful look at the curriculum of the theological institutions in Africa revealed that in most cases they did not reflect what could be considered an adequate program of missions and missionary training, even though “the spread of the gospel” frequently forms a part of the mission statements of these institutions. Many of the theological training institutions did not have much missions content. Some did not have any course on missions at all. Pastors being produced by these institutions had little or no understanding of nor interest in missions.

The workshop, therefore, saw an urgent need for our theological schools to include missions as an integral part of their programs. Likewise, there is a need

for the missions schools to include theological foundations in their training. With this sort of balanced training and preparation, every theological college graduate will have a “missionary sense and understanding, and every missions-trained graduate will have an adequate theological foundation.” In this case, it is hoped that both the missionary and the pastor will make disciples who will be mature, balanced Christians who will make a difference on the African continent and in the world as a whole. One of the many practical outcomes of the workshop was the compendium *Training God’s Servants* (1997), jointly edited by my husband Bayo, myself, and Alan Chilver.

Another positive example is the EMC training track’s launching of the Council of Missions Training in Africa (COMITA). The EMC has discovered that whereas a good number of schools of missions are emerging, many still need to improve their curriculum, use qualified trainers and teachers, and develop their philosophy of missions training. The result is that people are still being sent out ill equipped. Training issues were further addressed at an all-African consultation that was held in April 1998 in Accra, Ghana. The participants at this consultation agreed that the EMC should set up a body that could help all mission training programs improve in their quality, that could serve as a medium to exchange ideas and faculty, and that could help produce and distribute quality resource materials for missions training. This body, in effect, is serving as a regulatory body for missions training in Africa.

Other advances are seen in the training programs of two denominations. One large denomination in West Africa, the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA), which was pioneered by the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), targeted the rural areas through its mission organization called the Evangelical Missionary Society. It began to train vernacular evangelists and preachers in its Bible Training Schools (BTSS), with the sole aim of reach-

ing the local villages. The same thing has been going on in the Africa Inland Church (AIC), which was founded by the Africa Inland Mission (AIM).

Some Selection Procedures

Each training institution has its own selection procedures and criteria. Most require applicants to fill out a series of forms. The Agape School for Training in Discipleship and Missions, for example, requires candidates to fill out forms, obtain references from pastors and sometimes from other respected Christian leaders, write exams, and undergo oral interviews before they are accepted for enrollment for training. Once in the school, the new students are given a full week of intensive orientation to prepare them for the rigors of the training. The orientation allows them to know what to expect and the rationale for each course.

The training is three-pronged: formal, non-formal, and informal. Evaluations based on all three methods of training are given midway and at the end of training by a team of trainers made up of not less than five people. The non-formal and informal training areas carry more weight than the actual academic work, although that too is very important. A great deal of importance is laid on character building. With recommendations from the training center, a formal interview is conducted by the leaders of the mission to determine whether or not a candidate should be accepted into the mission. A missionary is accepted on probation for one year initially and then full time after the period of probation is over, if found suitable.

Family and MK Issues

The typical African culture and religions have little regard for women and children. They are to be seen and not heard. They are usually not reckoned with when important decisions are made. And yet we know that strong nations are made up of strong family units, which include wives, mothers, and children. Healthy fam-

ily units make healthy churches and healthy nations. A church or a nation that does not care for or have plans for its families, and especially for its children, is doomed to have problems of divorce, delinquency, crime, and other undesirable things to grapple with. The same will be true of any mission agency involved in sending out missionaries, if it does not take much thought for the family.

As inroads are being made in the areas of selection and training, so also is the African mission agency slowly advancing in the area of the family. One especially important issue is the needs of children and the effect that these needs have on the mission as a whole. Some mission organizations in Africa consider only the man or the husband as the bona fide missionary, and they post him to the field without any consideration for his wife and children. Experience has shown that either the wife or the children can destabilize work on the field, unless the needs of the entire family are met.

A prime example of the care a missionary family needs is the kind of care Messiah College is giving. My husband Bayo and I were both missionaries before our three children were born. We had our first two children in a little village where we were serving. Vehicles could only go in there once a week—on market days only. There was no kindergarten except a low standard public school some miles away, too far for a child to walk. And Bayo and I had no means of transportation. The only option left was for me to teach our children basic reading and writing skills at home (there wasn't any home school program in Nigeria then). This difficult experience led us to start a boarding secondary school for MKs a few years ago called Messiah College. It is our attempt to meet some of the teeming needs of MKs in Africa, starting with Nigeria. We of course were not the only missionary and ministry family facing the predicament of lack of provision for our children's education!

Provision for widows is another issue. "This church does not know how to ap-

preciate people. It does not value its staff. I left for training, and no one remembered that I had served here for so many years. It is not that I expect much, but just that they could have at least showed that I came out from among them and that they care. Now the church is doing the same with my friend who needs help with her children." These words were spoken to me by Danuba, a quiet, soft-spoken, and unassuming brother who had just enrolled for missions training. He had been serving with one of the leading evangelical churches in Nigeria in the area of education and had been nursing a vision of serving in cross-cultural church planting work. He subsequently resigned his job and enrolled for missions training, although with little support from his church.

I wondered why he was telling me these things. He had just introduced me to his friend, a widow, who wanted two of her children to attend our MK school, Messiah College. Apparently Danuba had tried to help enroll this lady's children in Messiah College the previous year, but for lack of sufficient funds they could not be enrolled. Danuba decided to help her again with the process and to enable her to talk with us in Messiah College.

The woman was despairing because of her inability to give quality education to her fatherless kids. "And their father died while in active service with the church," she said. She despaired also because the church had not come to her aid with the welfare of the children. And yet she herself is still on staff at the church, serving under this same organization in which her husband served and died. She and her children survive on a meager salary from the church (which is far from being enough), supplemented by proceeds from the sales of buns and donuts that she makes herself, which her children sell on the streets.

While her son Dubai, 11 years old, was being interviewed for placement in Messiah College, he was asked if he would prefer to attend a public school near home so he could be with his mother. His an-

swer was, "I will spend most of my time hawking donuts, and I don't enjoy doing that." He said he misses his father more when he has to hawk in order to earn money for the family.

Separation Issues

Ryang is a little 12-year-old girl who came to Messiah College in the year 2000. When she was asked about her parents during the interview preceding her admission, she began to sob. She continued crying for quite a while, so pathetically that the panel was helpless and simply allowed her to weep. Even when she later regained composure, she still would not talk about her family.

Messiah College then decided to make contact with the mission agency with which her parents serve, and we made a startling discovery. We found that Ryang does not get to see her parents often because they serve in a distant mission field. The last time she saw her family was when she was eight. Messiah College may not be able to solve this problem; nevertheless, we began to work at it. We said we were going to offer Ryang admission only on the condition that at least one of her parents comes with her on reporting day. This was an attempt to ensure some kind of security for Ryang, at least emotionally. She would at least see one parent, and she would be assured that her family knows exactly where on earth she is.

Another case is that of Tope, who is 17 now and is graduating from Messiah College this year, 2001. When his father brought him to Messiah College in 1995, he was only 11. And for the next three years that followed, he never set eyes on his family. He was constantly lonely, withdrawn, and quiet. He would not play like other youngsters in the school. When the time was drawing near for his class to write the Junior Secondary Certificate Exams, we felt we had to do something quickly so as not to jeopardize Tope's academic performance in the external exams. We had noticed that whenever he was withdrawn, he was weeping. We later learned

that he was crying because he assumed that his parents and family must all be dead! If not, he could not understand why he hadn't seen them. He concluded everyone was hiding the facts from him and not telling him the truth. To deal with this situation, the school decided to facilitate the process of getting Tope to visit his family during one of the Christmas holidays before the external exams his class was about to write.

As I have spoken with missionary parents and leaders about separation issues, I have been surprised and sometimes shocked by some of the things I have heard. For example, many denominational church-based missionaries get posted for missions not necessarily based on call or convictions. They are usually trained in vernacular schools as pastors, then become missionaries, and then are posted to remote, usually government-forsaken villages with no basic amenities for survival. Some pastors manage to lobby for better and favorable postings by playing and dancing along to the tune and dictates of their leaders. Those who do not satisfy their leaders risk getting sent to difficult areas without consideration of their families' needs, such as schooling for the children, health matters, etc. These missionaries end up sending their children to live with relatives or friends who agree to help keep them while they attend school.

While I was working on this chapter, a missionary from one of the leading agencies came to my office to talk about his children and the possibility of enrolling his son in Messiah College. Talking with him, I found out that while he was serving in a church planting situation, his children's education needs were not well met. This understandably bothered him and his wife a great deal. His solution was to find a way to be re-posted to a more favorable location, with access to good schools. Somehow he managed to get elected (done by ballot) as a coordinator of several fields. This position required him to relocate to a city from which he

could coordinate the work of the mission. It was from this "favorable" location he heard of Messiah College and came to see me. More often than not, many people get "favorably posted" by lobbying!

Some Issues for Missionary Wives

Very few mission agencies prepare and make use of the wives of the men who have been accepted and sent out as missionaries. It is only the men that are recognized as genuine missionaries. If the wife cannot accompany her husband, then the family is forced to separate. The wife remains in a nearby town or city with the children, so she can keep her job and so the children can go to school. In addition, the majority of the wives of missionaries are unschooled. While their husbands were being trained, they were usually tending the children and caring for their husbands.

Thankfully, there are some changes happening. The trend now among agencies is to try to train the illiterate wives. Many of them are taught how to be better wives and mothers, better home keepers, and better supporters of their missionary husbands. Some training institutions have added evangelism and other relevant courses to the training program for pastor/missionary wives.

Agape Missions and Calvary Ministries, for example, will not allow a married man or woman to enroll in the training program apart from the spouse. The two must both have a call, must both go through training, and must both be sent out as missionaries in their own right, though as a couple. Agape Missions has developed a curriculum for basic training of missions candidates who have no educational background. This includes a literacy program, from which the wives of missionary candidates have benefited a great deal. These women have been graduated and sent out with their husbands as full partners in ministry.

The new sending agencies are generally not prepared for unexpected and un-

timely deaths of serving missionaries. There are cases of missionary families (as in the case described above) where the husband/father and breadwinner has died, and the wife/mother and children are left alone and forgotten. Because no plan had been made for such an unforeseen time as this, sending groups do not seem to know what to do or how to handle the family in their grief and need. Many missionary widows and their children get forgotten. Of necessity, they pull out of the mission and the missions community in order to survive. Very few remain to continue with the ministry following their husband's death.

A successful mission director in Cameroon was sharing about the tragic loss of two of his missionaries. One died of a prolonged illness, leaving a wife and two small children. The other was killed in a ghastly motor accident, leaving a wife and seven children. In the first case, the two little ones were taken over by the non-Christian family of the deceased, to be placed among the relatives for care. But the missionary had denounced idols and had in turn been denounced by his family before his untimely death. Knowing this, the director of the mission went to the dead man's village and single-handedly negotiated to retain the children and to secure them for their mother. The wife and children of the missionary who died in the motor accident were all brought to live with the director's family. The mission director is still wrestling with how to help them with their loss and their practical support, as the mission has no policy in place yet to guide in the area of bereavement and care.

MK Education

Along with their children, missionary parents also struggle greatly with separation. Noel, for example, submitted his resignation letter to his mission board over this very issue. Upon receiving the letter, the leadership of the board wisely invited Noel to the mission headquarters for a

chat with the director. Noel had been an outstanding and very successful evangelist and church planter who was penetrating the rural areas of an unreached people group and was reaching out to the local people with the Jesus Film. He had won several people into the kingdom of God.

The "thorn in his flesh," though, was the issue of quality education for his children. In the search for good education, he and his wife had distributed the children to the homes of relatives in different towns, some of whom were not Christians. Unfortunately, Noel's wife was not educated, although Noel himself was a graduate of a theological seminary. She might have been of some help to the children's education if she had had some education herself. What kept gnawing at Noel's heart and conscience was the fact that whenever he made his rounds to visit his children, he never liked what he saw of them. They were imbibing habits and traits their parents had never taught them. The second child was beginning to steal, lie, and curse. Such things broke Noel's heart and prompted him straightway to submit his letter of resignation at the mission. He did it with tears in his eyes—not because he no longer had a call to continue in service, but because of his children's needs.

In talking with the mission director, Noel openly shared what he was going through. At this, the director sent Noel with a letter to us at Messiah College. It was that simple trip to Messiah College that sent Noel singing and rejoicing back to the mission field and to his ministry. His children were admitted into Messiah College at a huge discount. The college solicited help from friends and supporters to supplement the children's fees. After all, Noel never really wanted to quit the field. He was doing a fantastic job. But he felt a deep sense of responsibility and an obligation to his own children. The story is not over, though. We at Messiah College must still grapple with the issue of separation and with the fact that the children are not growing up under the

care and Christian influence of their parents.

Another person who comes to mind is Mallam Adamu. This man has a wonderful ministry reaching out to the desert/nomadic people of northern Nigeria, Niger, and Chad. He and his wife are both powerful evangelists who have been able to impact Muslim villages. But the itinerant nature of their ministry can never allow their children to have a stable school life. This is because most of the areas they cover have no schools apart from Koranic ones. Even if suitable schools are available, the parents work in very hostile environments where their lives are not always safe. Adamu's relatives are all Muslims, so he would not want to send any of his children to any of them. He was in a dilemma until he was directed to Messiah College.

One of the most unusual cases is that of Obi and Janet, who are serving in Swaziland. They have three children. The oldest is schooling in Nigeria and speaks English and a Nigerian language (the mother tongue) very well. The second child is schooling in Mozambique, because Obi and Janet served there for a couple of years. The schooling there is all in Portuguese. When the parents moved to Swaziland, they had to leave this child behind with a colleague's family to continue his education. The third child is with them in Swaziland and can speak some English and the Swastika language.

Many African missionaries serving in countries where the *lingua franca* is different from the one spoken in their home countries (and usually where the educational systems are different too) are not able to afford international school fees for their children. The children either attend national schools and then cannot fit in when they go back home, or they are sent away to live with relatives.

The most painful thing here with the family of Obi and Janet is not the separation, but the fact that the three children cannot communicate with one another when they come together! The parents were not willing to talk this issue over with

the mission board that sent them out, nor did they want us to talk to their leaders on their behalf. They did not want to be seen to be complaining or gossiping about their leaders. They would rather suffer and endure in silence or figure out their problems on their own. Likewise, many if not most African missionaries prefer to remain silent over their pains and traumas, or else they quietly resign or withdraw from the mission agency without stating what the reason for withdrawal really is.

Another couple, Joe and Pam, were serving in Liberia, when war broke out and they had to escape. On their return to Nigeria, they felt a call to go to Central African Republic (CAR), a French-speaking nation. Now, the question was what to do with the children, who had already started school in Liberia, an English-speaking country. The system of education in CAR is totally different. Their decision to enroll the children in Messiah College and to go to the mission field without them was a hard one. But the hardest part of the separation was the inability of the parents to afford air tickets for the children to be able to spend holidays with their parents in CAR. In trying to work out a solution to this in order to ease the pain of separation, Messiah College approached the leadership of the mission agency, soliciting some assistance for this family to unite at least once a year. But the leaders felt that it was Joe's family affair and that the family ought to be able to work through the problems in a way that would suit them without the "interference" of the mission.

Six years ago, my husband and I met two families in Togo who were doing an excellent job of planting churches. Today, however, they are no longer on the mission field. The first family had a 19-year-old son who had dropped out of school at the age of 16. He had gone through the French system of education until the junior year of secondary level. The parents then felt he needed to continue in an English school, but because they could not afford the fees for an international school,

they sent him to Nigeria. His French schooling background did not allow him to fit into the English system of education in Nigeria. Inevitably, he dropped out and was also jobless. His younger sister had a similar problem and just settled into an early marriage.

The second family, who had been instrumental in the planting of about 50 churches in northern Togo, had an equally heart-rending experience. Knowing that they could not afford international school fees, they decided to keep their children in a city in Nigeria a couple of hours' drive away from the capital city of Togo. They rented an apartment for their children, where the children lived all by themselves—about five of them of primary and secondary school ages. Each parent was paying a bi-monthly visit alternately. Eventually, they understood the dangers and the negative consequences of this arrangement. Their best recourse, regrettably, was to resign their service as church planters and go back home.

I was talking with an adult MK from Chad recently as he reminisced about how he went through school. He shared how he had to ride horseback on a three-day journey from the mission station to the nearest school. Because of the hassle of going to school that way, his younger brothers could not attend school. Instead, they became shepherd boys and are now illiterate adults. Did it have to be that way?

Some mission agencies and a few denominational mission boards are looking into the area of MK education and are offering what they call a “children’s education allowance” to missionary families. In some cases, these allowances offset most of the schooling bills of the MKs, depending on their grade levels. But in many cases, the parents have to make up whatever differences there may be. Messiah College, for example, as a service ministry to missionary families, is always giving discounts ranging from 30% to 80%. This is always done in faith, trusting that God will provide the rest.

Another positive development is that three years ago, an evangelical group (ECWA) opened a children’s hostel in West Africa. There are about 75 MKs of different age groups and grade levels presently being accommodated. Most go to nearby schools, including the ECWA staff school, while some go through the pre-school and primary school programs using the Accelerated Christian Education (or the School of Tomorrow) curriculum.

Physical Health

The health of African missionaries has not yet received much attention in many quarters. In general, there is no organized, consistent, ongoing provision for health care. However, in an emergency, “fire brigade” attention will be given to the need. The African continent is largely a rural continent, and basic amenities such as health delivery services are luxuries in many areas. This is especially true in the rural areas where missionaries are mostly found. Most missionaries hardly ever go for routine medical check-ups unless they are ill. Even then, if the problem is something that they can manage on their own with self-medication, they will not hesitate to do so, unless it becomes an emergency.

Malarial fever, typhoid fever, and dysentery are some of the common diseases in Africa with which missionaries have to contend. Malaria is so common that many people just treat themselves with over-the-counter drugs. Regular health check-ups are not common practice by agencies, so in many cases agencies do not have a physician specifically assigned to do such check-ups on missionaries. There may be Christian physicians in private practice who may volunteer their clinics or their time to help missionaries, and they will often offer discounts for consultancy and treatment. Some mission agencies may have particular hospitals, clinics, or mission-owned hospitals where they will refer their missionaries for consultations and treatment, but I am not aware yet of a

hospital or a clinic in Africa set up solely for missionaries and their families.

The most threatening factor to the health of missionaries and their families is stress. This is so because most African missionaries do not take leave or vacations. They work and continue to work until they are no longer able to work. Many African missionaries work under very austere conditions, and often they are stressed by many factors, including long years of work without vacation, lack of adequate provision, family and children's issues, trauma from civil or religious wars, communal clashes, and so on.

The children of a Nigerian missionary family who served in Sierra Leone still become hysterical at the mere mention of the name "Sierra Leone." They went through a number of traumatic experiences during the country's rebel war, before they were rescued and evacuated by the United Nations peacekeeping corps. No one thought of doing any kind of therapy to help these children overcome the trauma that they experienced. The family never went back to Sierra Leone. They are in another country still serving as missionaries, but their children live in constant fear of anything that sounds like gunshots or war.

It is not uncommon to find one missionary doing the jobs of five people. Because of this, missionaries need to go on vacation at regular intervals, in order to maintain their physical, mental, and spiritual health and to avoid burnout. Most do not do this. Some consider themselves too busy to take a vacation or break. The work is too important. And where there are not enough people to cover the work, there is the fear that the work will collapse. Some think it is unspiritual to go on vacation when souls are perishing. It is never surprising to hear a missionary (and even his/her leader) boast of having not gone on any break for the past 10 years of ministry! And yet there are some who would be happy to have a vacation if only they could afford to do so with their families.

Mission leaders who have had cases of burnout in personnel are beginning to think of the general health of the missionary. As a start, some leaders are recalling their missionaries for "refresher" courses. It is hoped that this input/break will help missionaries develop and improve themselves intellectually and spiritually, as well as provide rest by getting them out of their work domain. For example, member groups of the Nigerian Evangelical Mission Association (NEMA) send their missionaries for short courses or conferences organized by the NEMA-owned institute, the Nigerian Evangelical Missionary Institute. These courses run for a couple of weeks or a few months. They are long enough to enable missionaries to learn but short enough to allow them to get back to their base on the mission field without being gone too long from the work.

Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare is commonplace in any typical mission field in Africa. In many cases, the sending agencies or mission boards endeavor to set up consistent and effective prayer support for their missionaries (prayer support is covered more than financial support). Churches along with cell groups of various sizes and age groups have effectively mobilized for the prayer support of missionaries in the major sending countries. Women's prayer groups are in the forefront of this kind of support.

Missionaries from Pentecostal church backgrounds are nowadays being trained to engage in spiritual warfare, praying against the territorial spirits that rule the regions or the tribes in which the missionaries serve. In fact, some schools of missions include spiritual warfare or power encounter as a course in the curriculum. Prayers with long days of dry fasts (i.e., fasting with no eating and no drinking of water or other fluids) are part and parcel of the missionary work in Africa. Missionaries whose church background has not prepared them for power encounter have had to learn the hard way. Some sending

agencies and churches have learned from their casualties as a result of demonic attacks. They had no choice but to believe and to take action in the area of adequate preparation for power encounter and spiritual warfare.

An example of spiritual warfare is a team of five missionaries (a couple and three singles), who were serving in Senegal when suddenly their health came under severe attack. The team leader developed inexplicable and excruciating pain all over his body. He could neither sit nor lie down. All the doctors he saw could not diagnose anything. His wife had persistent and bitter migraines. One of the men, a very effective cross-cultural missionary, went out of his mind with depression. The only team member still able to function was a young lady, a short-termer. The team leader, sensing the danger they were all in, decided that the surviving missionary, the short-termer, who was also a novice on the field, should be sent with an SOS back to the mission headquarters. She also took along with her the depressed colleague.

The moment she stepped into the headquarters office with her sick colleague, she burst into tears (tears that had been suppressed throughout their journey), and it took her a few moments to be able to explain what was going on in Senegal. A hasty prayer summons was sent to all prayer partners, while the director of the mission along with two others made a quick trip to Senegal to visit the team and pray. Within a week, everyone on the field had recovered with no medical intervention or explanation. But the man who was brought back home could not get back to the field for a long while. In fact, it took over 10 years before he could return to the field, and even then it was not to the same field but to another. And that was after receiving professional counseling for several months. This whole incident involved spiritual warfare—genuine physical and emotional problems, but stemming from the enemy.

The Way Forward

In May 2000, a continental missions conference in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, called "Mission Africa" brought together missions and church leaders from around the continent. During this conference, the Evangelism and Missions Commission (EMC) of the AEA launched the member care track for Africa. The track works to increase awareness about member care needs and resources, especially among mission leaders. A main strategy is to hold member care awareness seminars and consultations in each region of the continent for mission executives and leaders. Initially, communication between members of the track (and in general) posed a huge hindrance to achieving some of the goals. It is still difficult, especially in areas where telephone services are not very efficient and where the postal service is very slow.

In July 2001, the EMC convened a member care consultation in Cameroon for the central African region. It was attended by mission and church leaders, pastors, and some missionaries. It was a very valuable time, and there was a lot of brainstorming on what should be done on the issue of the care of missionaries in Central Africa. We decided to organize a special awareness seminar for 2002, where many more leaders—the decision makers—will be invited to come and hear and also contribute. A regional member care committee has been set up for this region. The members will work together, looking into the needs of the care of the African missionaries in the region. Also in the pipeline for 2002 is member care training for mission executives and/or personnel managers of mission agencies and boards for the West African region.

Travel within the continent is expensive, especially by air—probably more so than anywhere else in the world. So it is a challenge financially to meet together. In addition, the instability of some African countries makes planning and attending member care/missions events difficult. For example, at the time the Cameroon con-

sultation was held, there were no participants from Central African Republic (CAR), because of the uncertainties caused by a rebel war and an attempt to topple the ruling government.

In conclusion, African missions have come a very long way. There is a growing member care awareness, and I believe that some significant changes will soon take place to provide better support for mission personnel. We are praying for more people to become involved in member care and to raise the standard of care. Our mission efforts will thus improve because our staff will be better prepared and cared for as they serve the Lord in missions.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some of the main logistical obstacles to developing member care in Africa?
2. What does a typical member care program/approach include for an African sending church/agency? How does it compare with the member care program/approach from your sending group?
3. Review some of the challenges of African missionary wives or missionary children. What could be done to support them further and to help them contribute to missions?
4. List some ways that non-Africans could work with Africans to develop member care within organizations and at the regional level.
5. Recall some of the case examples in this article—positive or negative. Which ones affected you the most and why?

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