Member Care Update

Ethnê-MC Facilitation Team
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Ethnê-MC Update **Issue 3: February 2008**

Welcome again to the *Update*! The special topic this month is **Doing *Sender Care* Well**. Our monthly reports inform you about important member care resources, news, and topics. We especially want to further equip people with member care responsibilities who are focussing on mission/aid personnel in least-reached people groups (LPGs). In addition to the mission/aid emphasis, each report usually contains material from the international humanitarian, health, business, and human resource sectors. Each report is archived on our web site: **www.ethne.net/membercare**. Feel free to share the *Update* with others and your networks! May our Lord bless you.

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Both churches and mission agencies are strongly encouraged to work together in order to develop their mission/aid personnel. Sending groups are committed to invest themselves and their resources, including finances, into staff care/development. Sending groups aspire to have a comprehensive, culturally relevant, and sustainable approach to member care from recruitment through retirement, including a commitment to organizational development, connecting with outside resources, and effective administration of member care programs. They thus integrate member care into the organization and integrate the organisation into member care.
(adapted from: Doing Member Care Well, p. 18)

In this Issue: Doing *Sender Care* Well

SPECIAL RESOURCES: Tools to further equip you for member care

- *Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel, People in Aid*

Read and reread these 32 pages of practical guidelines on sender care, now in four languages.
www.peopleinaid.org

SPECIAL EVENTS: Gatherings to help you connect/contribute to the member care field

- *USA: Society for Human Resource Management, International Conference March/April 2008*

Member care practitioners are encouraged to connect with the international human resources field.
www.shrm.org

SPECIAL TOPICS: Current issues and approaches related to member care

- *Member Care: A Shared Responsibility; by Neal Pirolo*

Neal shares on the vital need for cooperation between agency and church in supporting workers.
www.eri.org

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The *Update* is compiled on behalf of the *Ethnê-Member Care Network*. We are a growing *network of colleagues* from different nations and organisations. Our passion is to see the least-reached people groups (LPGs) experience the transforming love of Jesus Christ. We are committed to help provide and develop member care resources in order to support the diversity of people/senders who are working among LPGs. Our *Network* is part of the Ethnê to Ethnê Movement (**www.ethne.net**).

Email: mc@ethne.net
Ethnê-MC Website: **www.ethne.net/membercare**
Subscribe: Ethne-MC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
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SPECIAL RESOURCES: Tools to further equip you for member care

- *Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel, People in Aid*

Most of us have heard of "good practice", and codes of good practice. One of the best developed codes is by the UK-based organisation, People In Aid. The *Code* consists of seven core principles (reproduced below), specific criteria to monitor implementation (key indicators), and case examples. If you have not read it yet, we encourage you to do so. And if you have read it already, then we encourage you to read through it again—regularly. The *Code* can be downloaded for free in French, Spanish, German, and English. Many other helpful resources are also available for free or low-cost from People In Aid.

[Editor's note: From a Christian/faith-based perspective, good practice codes are strengthened when they include a) a clearly stated philosophical foundation regarding the duty and responsibility of sending groups to care for their staff; and b) a clearly stated emphasis on both the intrinsic worth and the strategic worth of people/personnel.]

Guiding Principle: People are central to the achievement of our mission

Principle 1: Human Resources Strategy. Human resources are an integral part of our strategic and operational plans.

Principle 2: Staff Policies and Practices. Our human resources policies aim to be effective, fair and transparent.

Principle 3: Managing People. Good support, management and leadership of our staff is key to our effectiveness.

Principle 4: Consultation and Communication. Dialogue with staff on matters likely to affect their employment enhances the quality and effectiveness of our policies and practices.

Principle 5: Recruitment and Selection. Our policies and practices aim to attract and select a diverse workforce with the skills and capabilities to fulfil our requirements.

Principle 6: Learning, Training and Development. Learning, training and staff development are promoted throughout the organisation.

Principle 7: Health, Safety and Security. The security, good health and safety of our staff are a prime responsibility of our organisation.

Contact: www.peopleinaid.org

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SPECIAL EVENTS: Gatherings to help you connect/contribute to the member care field

- *Boston USA: Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)Conference 31/03-3/04 2008*

Human resource (HR) and member care (MC) personnel can experience extensive networking and further training with an international focus at the SHRM Global Conference and Exposition. Have a look at the SHRM web site to review the many presentations, resources, and emphases of this gathering. Note though that at over $1,000 for registration, this conference is not for everybody!

[Editor's note: The mission/aid community would benefit by having some of its MC personnel regularly connect with this overlapping and important field of HR. These people could then conduct special tracks, interest groups, workshops, and plenaries at MC-related conferences, specifically devoted to helping colleagues better understand and connect with material in the HR field. Some sample topics would be on good practices related to diversity, ethics and compliance guidelines, human rights issues for local staff, employment/volunteer law, and safety standards. In general the HR field is something to be informed about rather than immersed in—and different member care workers will connect with it in different ways.]

Contact: http://www.shrm.org/conferences/global/

Other sites to visit for HR information:

http://www.hrmguide.net

http://www.managementhelp.org/hr_mgmnt/hr_mgmnt.htm

Member Care: A Shared Responsibility

by Neal Pirolo www.eri.org

A number of years ago I wrote an article entitled, *The Great Divorce*. It should have been titled, *A Painful Reconciliation*. In allegorical form it spoke of the Church divorcing itself from the Command Jesus had given it: "*Go! Into all of the world.*" I suggested that the divorce took place in 1793 when William Carey was rebuked for his passion for the lost, with the words, "*If God wants to save the heathen, He'll do it without your help or ours.*"

But I quickly fast-forwarded to the present Church, which is saying, *"We were wrong. We want to—we need to—reengage in the mission process."* But with reluctance, the Agency, like a 'faithful spouse', is struggling to let them back in. *"What would you do? Where would you fit in? Where were you when we needed you? We have set up structures to accommodate your leaving. You have no experience. And, furthermore, I'm not sure we can (or want to) relinquish anything to you!"*

As I survey the mission process: From the awakening of the Christian community to *"lift up their eyes"* to the needs of the lost all the way through to the retirement of a mission worker, there is no better place for the Church to reengage in the mission process than in the ongoing care of their mission workers. Yes, most agencies, in the absence of the Church, have established structures of care. The task is enormous! Some large agencies have even designated whole departments to the business of Member Care. And many agencies are putting considerable time and energy into providing care for their members. Unfortunately, such care can sometimes prove to be woefully inadequate, as reflected in the personnel/practices of three types of struggling member care departments that I have observed: *out of touch, personnel-challenged, and burned-out*.

Member Care Departments and Poor Practice

1. Out of touch. Shortly after *Serving As Senders* was published (a book on Church Level Member Care), I was given the opportunity to share its concepts with the Director of Member Care of a rather large mission agency. "It would certainly be an asset for our mission workers," a couple in his department told him. After setting three appointments to meet with him, he still hadn't read the book. At this couple's encouragement, we agreed to meet, anyway.

My concern now was how I would succinctly present the thesis of this book to the director. I decided to give a brief overview of the six areas of care: Encouragement, Logistics, Financial, Prayer, Communication and Reentry. And then tell the story of Beth, a mission worker who struggled through several months of reentry stress, finding no help—anywhere! In a final, desperate appeal, one Sunday morning she again approached her pastor. His reply: "Beth, I am busy! But if you must, call and set an appointment for a week from next Wednesday." In that moment she "realized" she wasn't worth anybody's time. She went home and swallowed a bottle of Valium! By God's grace, and a roommate sensitive to the Spirit's leading, Beth was found and taken to the hospital. She recovered.

This story is bit dramatic, for sure. And that is not the end of most reentry stories, of course. But certainly this Director of Member Care would be aware of the seriousness of the issues mission workers face on the field or when they come home. His response struck me with as much impact as Beth's pastor's had on her. "Neal, this sort of thing doesn't really happen!" What should I say? What *could* I say? This person obviously is not in touch with the reality of reentry, I thought. A few words were mumbled about what a great work his organization is doing. And the appointment was over. Not until months later did I learn that a lady from that organization had succeeded in committing suicide just months previous to our appointment.

2. Personnel-Challenged. The reentry time in the life of a mission remains shrouded in ignorance. I believe the mission agency is more aware of the problems of reentry than the Church, but "personnel-challenged" as they usually are, they often do not have the staff to deal with the issues. One regional office of a large agency, after a tragic suicide of a returned mission worker, established a tremendous program of education in the churches of that district. But personnel were reassigned, others retired, and the program "died" (no pun intended). "It probably will not be revived until another tragedy awakens them to the vital need for care-giving during this critical time," a reassigned person told me.

3. Burned-out. I recently attended a conference and was assigned to the Member Care Track. A very sincere, well-experienced speaker, who displayed every sign of near burnout, expressed the "rat race reality" of running from one critical location to another, trying to deal with the issues which were overwhelming the mission workers. It was as if this person were a fireman, trying to control a forest fire with a garden hose. Thus burdened, Agency Level Member Care personnel certainly have no energy to deal with the smouldering issues which would have been eliminated (or greatly minimized) with a good "fire prevention program" of Church Level Member Care.

Agencies in general, by all standards of measure, are struggling in the area of member care. And unfortunately, the Church at large is basically ignorant of the issues mission workers face. Believing the myth that once mission workers join an agency, the workers belong to the agency, the Church wipes its hands of any responsibility toward their members. This posture of ignorance, along with the agency's difficulty in handling problems, can yield a deplorable situation of struggling mission workers either plowing through to a retirement of loneliness or quitting in frustration, anger or despair. Is there a solution?

The Way Forward

Agency-Initiated Reconciliation. It was my privilege to speak about Church Level Member Care to a group of mission candidates. Their agency had brought the senior pastor of each candidate's sending church to join them for this training. With the foresight of wisdom, this agency established a division specifically for the purpose of reengaging the Church in the mission process. And they chose this most critical area of member care. They see this as the first and best place for the Church to get involved. In an after-session with just the pastors, we came to grips with what would have to change in their church structure in order to take on the primary care of their mission workers.

Church-Initiated Reconciliation. A pastor was on the Board of a mission agency. Prior to a board meeting, the agency had just received the shipment of it's custom edition of *Serving As Senders*. The pastor got a copy, and somehow managed to actually read the book during the long night-drive back home, following the board meeting. (Not recommended, by the way—to read a book while driving!) Back at his church, he had his secretary type a letter of resignation for each of the Mission Committee members in his church. He then called a meeting of the Committee. He handed each member a Letter of Resignation and told them to sign it. Not sure what was going on, yet understanding the dramatic bent in their pastor, they each signed their paper. "Now tear it up," he said. "This is to let you know that we are not 'doing missions' the same way anymore." And he laid out the basic concepts of the book: Forming a team of people who will take ownership for their part of the mission worker's objectives. Years later I was invited to do a "turbo-charged" seminar at this church for their twenty-one *Quest Teams*, the name they had given to the people who had prayerfully committed to be the leadership for the teams of their twenty-one mission families.

The agency and the Church must take the steps, as painful as they may be, toward reconciliation. And the finest point to begin is at member care. Whether it is initiated by the agency or by the Church, it *must* take place. And both groups *must* actively participate.

• Agencies must relinquish their attempts at providing the total care package. This begins by being honest about the number of hurting members in their agency.
• Agencies must rewrite their Policy Handbook to require the mission workers to have a care team, functioning in all six areas, *before* they depart for the field.
• Agencies must be alert to field needs of their workers and engage the Church in the solutions.
• Churches must develop the team concept, including those who go and those who serve as senders.
• Churches must not allow their members to leave until they have a functioning support team, no matter how "desperately" they may be needed on the field.
• Churches must provide a dual commissioning service, holding accountable both the mission workers to the task to which they have committed *and* the Church and the specific support team to affirm their commitment to the tasks to which they have pledged.

With a deep breath of commitment, these are starting points for reconciliation. May God give us the wisdom, understanding, *and* grace to begin taking these steps—together!