

For Everything There Is A Season...And A Summons

[Note from Kelly O'Donnell August 2006:

This first draft of this *Summons* was December 15, 2005. The final version, (reproduced here) was sent to many colleagues via email in July 1996. My wife and I were especially concerned with the need to connect with others in order to further develop member care specifically within frontier missions. In 1997 much of the content of the *Summons* appeared in an article that I did for the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, "Member care in missions: Global perspectives and future directions". The call for a global "purposeful affiliation" in the *Summons* was largely realized via the formation of MemCa, launched in 1998 as part of the WEA Mission Commission. MemCa began as a task force, and developed into a network of colleagues from different regions, organizations, and member care specialties. MemCa emphasized member care on behalf of mission personnel from the Newer Sending Countries and those working among Unreached People Groups. For more information on MemCa and its history, visit the "MemCa Info" section at www.membercare.org.]

July, 1996

To: Member Care Colleagues

From: Drs. Kelly and Michele O'Donnell

Re: The Member Care Field

Dear Colleagues,

We are writing this letter to you and a few others in order to share a growing conviction that we have on our hearts. The essence of it is this: **there is a need to deliberately join together with a core group of like-minded colleagues in order to further develop the member care field, especially within frontier missions.** If you have a similar conviction, then this letter--this summons--may be for you.

Some Background

About five years ago something happened to me (Kelly) while we were attending the annual Mental Health and Missions Conference in the United States. The conference theme that year dealt with models and approaches for helping missionaries, and the presentations were excellent. Surprisingly, as the conference drew to a close, I started to feel uneasy. I sensed something stirring deep within me, as if a fire was being lit inside of me! Something important seemed to be missing in the presentations--but not just here at the conference, but in the general member care community as well.

Within a few minutes I was able to clarify what I was sensing, and I shared it with the participants: **"We must move beyond the individual, family, and agency approaches to care, and develop a more systematic, global, cooperative approach to providing member care. We must develop a 'macro-model' for member care."**

Shortly after the conference I began to write down my thoughts concerning this macro model--of how to further develop member care globally. In the summer of 1992, I published my ideas in two places--in the "Missionary Care" book I edited, and in the International Journal of Frontier Missions. I called the article: "An Agenda for Member Care". Have you read this article? Please do. And please reread it too! Right now though, let's look at a few excerpts from the final section.

1. The member care momentum in missions today is most heartening. Yet there must be a direction for this momentum: to prioritize and channel member care resources towards those working among the least evangelized.

2. Further developing this field is not something to be left up to chance. Neither is it the responsibility of a single conference nor a periodic meeting where member care issues

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are addressed. Rather, mutual consultation, coordinated efforts, perseverance, and interdependency are to be the guiding principles.

3. Member care must keep in stride with current missions thinking and realities. The missions force is rapidly expanding, a fact which is especially true for missionaries from the Two-Thirds World. This expansion must be mirrored within the global missions community by developing appropriate, comprehensive member care programs and services.

*4. Finally, I am convinced that the time has come to actively pull together the various pockets of member care workers around the world. It is also time to systematically train and mobilize many others for this strategic ministry. **And the time is here for anointed leaders to step forward and help steer this field in response to the Lord's direction.***

Anointed Leaders

One does not have to be the director of a mission agency to be an "anointed leader". A person can also work "behind the scenes" and still be just as anointed and just as influential. We are looking to purposefully affiliate with a few such people--be they "up-front" or back-room" type leaders--in order to further develop member care.

Here are some possible criteria to guide the formation and activities of this affiliation. These criteria are our initial ideas, and will be revised based on each others' feedback.

*We would first of all like to work with friends whom we know and trust. This is as important as the actual skill levels that we would bring to this group.

*We would each be already actively involved in providing member care services.

*Our focus would be on personnel and agencies working among unreached peoples.

*We would be located at key points around the world (e.g., London, Singapore, etc.)

*We would each have a call to further develop member care beyond our current organizational roles and other professional responsibilities, and to do so both globally and within a given region.

*Our respective organizations would be aware of our involvement together, and stand behind us in this endeavor.

*We would actually have time to participate in some joint projects--at least two hours a week, and one work day a month.

*We would plan to meet together for at least a weekend once every two years, possibly in conjunction with a major conference.

*We would use electronic mail to communicate regularly with each other.

*We would have some funds available to help with logistical costs.

*We would have a coordinator for this group, and rotate this responsibility.

In short, we would be an interagency, informally affiliated group of friends, who are highly committed to work together on consensually-derived, cutting edge member care projects which will be of direct, strategic benefit to those serving in frontier missions.

Possible Projects

Let us say from the start that we do not want to pursue some overly visionary scheme. Nor do we want such an affiliation to become burdensome to anyone. Rather, we want to see a solid group of motivated, creative member care friends come together, start out small, stay small if necessary, and go after some "do-able" projects. So what would some of the output be for our "raison de etre". Here are some possibilities.

1. Organizing Member Care

*Develop an interagency team/network of care givers within our respective regions (e.g., Southeast Asia, Africa, CIS).

*Help mission and service agencies develop member care centers within a region (e.g., the current proposal in India)

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*Provide services together via short-term field visits and at strategic conferences (e.g., at key international gatherings for our respective mission agencies).

*Consult with mission associations concerning member care when requested (e.g., WEF, AD2000, regional partnerships), and specifically, inquiring about setting up a member care task force as part of the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement.

*Form an association of member care workers, perhaps within another organization/mechanism--ICMK, AD2000, International Association of Christian Counselors.

2. Communication and Writing

*Oversee an email forum for people around the world to communicate about member care issues, needs, and news.

*Publishing a magazine possibly twice a year, with cutting-edge articles, updates and current member care-related events, commentaries and perspectives--maybe something like INTERACT's 16 page magazine. We would all serve as contributing editors.

*Be a clearing house for information, current events, articles/publications/dissertations on member care related areas.

*Compile and update a global member care referral guide/Dbase, using the "Global Listing of Member Care Groups" as a foundation (published 1/96 in EMQ).

3. Training

*Find ways to equip national Christians and mission leaders with member care skills. *Teach at key graduate schools, such as a course on member care.

*Develop practicum opportunities in missionary care for graduate students.

Such projects can be done! How do we know? Well, a number of similar joint member care projects have come together over the last few years. Examples include the MK-CART/CORE group's research on missionary kids and schools; the book "Missionary Care" which was the effort of six consulting editors and 23 authors; the formation of an interagency member care group for North Africa and one for the Middle East, and gatherings that have brought together member care workers, like the ICMK or the annual meetings of Mission Personnel Directors in the USA and the UK.

What might you get out of all of this personally? Meaningful work, strategic involvement in missions, professional consultation and support, and hopefully a crown with an extra jewel or two in it that you can cast at the feet of the Lord who has saved us!

Summons Proper

So, what do you think? Please do take this summons before the Lord in prayer. And please give us feedback concerning:

*The overall idea of putting together such a group of friends

*Some of the criteria/guidelines we suggest for involvement together

*Specific projects this group should consider

*Any mechanisms/forums to carry out our purpose

*A possible name for this group.

Is the Lord calling you to be part of such a purposeful affiliation?

"This brief summary is presented in order to encourage mental health professionals [and other member care workers] to capitalize on those aspects of their current professional life which are their greatest strengths, and to find some ways to translate those strengths into an effective contribution to the missionary endeavor."

Jarrett Richardson, MD "Teaching Nigerian Psychiatry in Nigeria" (1989).

Warmly yours in our Lord,

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Kelly and Michele O'Donnell, PsyD

KOD/MCA--First draft, December 15, 1995