Care Teams for Sent-Ones by John Barnett

Missionary Care Through the Local Church

Care Teams are the most tangible expression of our church’s commitment to support our missionaries who are serving in cross-cultural environments. The team is centered around one team leader and can be made up of 3-8 individuals who provide on-going care and support. They serve as a primary link between the church as a whole and the missionary.

Simply put, a care team is a group of people who deeply love and care for their missionary unit. They communicate, pray for and stay connected to their missionary unit on a regular basis. Because of these strong personal relationships, the missionaries can be open and honest, allowing his or her team to see needs and share successes and defeats.

**What Is the Vision for a Care Team?**

There are two major roles of every Care Team: care and representation. The success of the care team depends on its ability to accomplish these two goals from the time that the missionary unit prepares to leave for the field until his or her return.

**Care**

Many missionaries minister in physically challenging environments. Some are raising children far from extended family. Others struggle with cultural adjustments and language barriers. Most significantly, all serve on the front lines of spiritual warfare. For survival and spiritual health, every missionary unit needs the assurance that they are not alone, that there are others in the body of Christ who love them and are committed to their welfare and to the success of their work. Missionaries need empathetic listeners and caring friends who are not in a supervisory role. The Care Team can consistently provide that kind of spiritual and emotional care. Caring also involves identifying specific needs which the team can meet or organize others in the church to meet.

**Representation**

The Care Team also champions the missionary and his or her work to the church body and advocates for ongoing participation in their ministry even when he or she is far away. Thanks to the efforts of the Care Team, the church feels an ongoing sense of connection to our workers.

**What Does a Care Team Look Like?**

We have intentionally kept the structure of our Care Teams simple. The foundation of each Care Team is the team leader. He/She is the one who has the main connection with the missionary unit and leads the team in all aspects. The team leader either already knows the missionary deeply or commits to build a deep relationship. The rest of the team is built under the leadership of this committed person.

Each Care Team will look different. Some will have a team leader with 6-8 additional people on the team while others will have a leader with just one or two additional people on the team. Both types of teams can serve as great care networks for our missionaries.

Depending on the team members’ season of life, people may need to step out of their Care Team. We ask however that team leaders commit to the missionary full term (2-4 years) and/or be willing to replace themselves in this role if needed.

**What Does a Care Team Do?**

**Meet Monthly**

Teams can meet at anytime and anywhere; we just ask that each team meet once a month to fulfill their role as advocates. We suggest that you build a team around a missional group that already exist in the church. For example, Sunday School Class members, Prayer group, Life Group, Community group, etc.

**Pray**

The main role of a Care Team is to pray monthly as a team and on an individual basis. We also ask that you hold your missionaries accountable to regularly update their prayer requests.

**Stay Connected**

Ask any missionary and they will tell you that they rarely stay connected with their friends and church family back home. Part of providing care to missionaries is the commitment to stay connected. Your missionary unit should hear from you at least once a month. This can happen through emails, Zoom, handwritten letters or any number of creative ways. Make sure this is part of your team meeting.

**Send Care Packages**

Nothing says I love you to a missionary quite like a box full of ranch dressing mix, chocolate and a few good books! Care Teams will send at least two care packages a year to their missionary unit. Perhaps the church can help with the cost of shipping two packages each year with hopes of your team sending a few more packages using personal funds, if possible.

**Help with Departure and Arrival**

Some of the hardest times for your missionary unit will be preparing to leave for the field and returning home for a stateside visit. There are a thousand things that need to be done and we ask that your team jump in and help as much as possible.

**How Do We Get Started?**

Here are three things to do to get your Care Team started:

**Email the Team**

Once the team leader is in place, he/she can email others on the team or start recruiting for the team. Get everyone on an email list and start communicating with one another.

**Email your Missionary**

The team leader needs to email the missionary and let them know their Care Team is forming. Ask for prayer requests and invite the missionary unit to the first meeting via Zoom.

**Meet as a Team**

Set a date for your first meeting. Pick a home to meet in and share a meal with one another. During this meeting make sure you get to know each other, pray for the missionaries and if possible, talk to your missionary unit on Zoom. Also make sure you set up a regular time and place to meet.