

# SENDING CHURCH



## *Cultivating Relationship with the Sending Church*

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

*“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:2-3*



### QUOTES

“We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation. Mission means sending, and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history.”<sup>1</sup> Darrell Guder

“There is a summons to everyone who will hear to submit inherited patterns of Church life to the searching scrutiny of the Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> Lesslie Newbigin

“It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.”<sup>3</sup> Jurgen Moltmann

“If we compare our modern missionary work with the missionary work of the Early Church, this is what differentiates them: with us, missions are the special work of a special organization; in the Early Church missions were not a special work, and there was no special organization.”<sup>4</sup> Roland Allen



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After processing and applying this material on the sending church, the candidates should be able to...

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- communicate clearly the current nature of their relationship to the sending church.
- cultivate their relationship with a sending church in a meaningful and intentional manner.
- name their sending church's level and breadth of commitment to them as a candidate.
- name their own level and breadth of commitment towards their sending church.
- understand the critical importance of partnering with a church throughout their cross-cultural ministry experience.

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## THE SENDING AND COMMISSIONING CHURCH

The church is God's vessel for making and sending disciples. It is the local church, not organizations, not conventions, not boards, not para-church organizations or other non-profits, that is charged with making disciples. If the church outsources the Great Commission, it sells its soul. So, the local church must be about the work of proclaiming the Good News, welcoming people into the body of Christ through baptism, and teaching people how to be obedient to Christ's teachings. This work is to be done wherever there are not disciples. Thus, sending is critical to the very nature and identity of the local church.

Allow me to borrow from David Bosch: *Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is a church because there is a mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people since God is a fountain of sending love.*<sup>5</sup>

Again, sending is not a program for the church to decide if we will do this or if we will do that. It is not like saying, will we have a children's ministry, a youth ministry, a senior adult ministry, a softball team or a conference. The mission of God is why the church exists.

It is to this sending bride that sent ones, people just like you, must be connected. For when it sends, the bride bears fruit that confirms its identity and relationship to Christ. Therefore, it is critical that you richly engage in a relationship to the local church.

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## CASE STUDY: GOING IS EASY. PARTNERING IS HARD.

Tom and Lisa lived in a Central Asian community as cross-cultural workers when the Spirit began to meddle in their lives, their team, and their sending church.

Two years earlier, Tom and Lisa had been sent out as the leaders of a long-term church-based team. This team was part of their home church's strategic adoption and partnership with a Central Asian people group. As the church began to engage this people group, it seemed natural to send and support people from the congregation to live within the community and bear witness to the love and transformational power of Christ.

Now, two years into the process and with a new daughter, the Spirit spoke a fresh word to Tom and Lisa. Through a relationship with other Christian workers, Tom and Lisa became aware of

a critical need in a neighboring country with a marginalized people group. This need resonated with their personal skill sets and passions. However, both the people group and location were a departure from their home church's strategic people group adoption and partnership. As well, the location and environment were very different from what their team had grown accustomed to living and working in over the last two years.

Tom and Lisa brought this fresh word from the Spirit to their team and home church anticipating quick acceptance and affirmation. However, as they began to share about this possibility, they were quickly met with differing reactions.

They received a variety of responses from the larger mission team, all of whom were sent out by the same church. One family felt they could not make the move and that if the team was moving forward with the decision, they would have to leave the team. Another single felt good about the decision but was very concerned about how her role as a single woman would be affected in the new and more conservative environment.

The response of their home church was surrounded by questions. What about the vision for the Central Asian people group? What about the cohesiveness of the team? What about language learning and relationships that the team would be walking away from? In short, this move was seen as outside of the scope of the church's international work and partnerships. Added to this mix of responses was the advice of the partner organization under which Tom, Lisa and the team served on the field. This organization did not financially support the team, but it did offer coaching and strategy consultation. The organization had a long history of work amongst this new people group and country. Their response to the new word for Tom and Lisa was filled with great enthusiasm and affirmation.

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Lastly, there was the response of Tom and Lisa's individual supporters. These individuals and families represented a wide variety of responses from full affirmation to disappointment and withdrawal of support.

So where did this leave Tom and Lisa? They felt they had received a clear word from the Lord on a new opportunity to serve the Kingdom. One person on the team shared this vision while another clearly expressed that she cannot be a part of this new venture. Their home sending church did not resonate with this new calling and stated that while they didn't want to pull the rug out on Tom and Lisa's financial support, they might not be able to *send* them or *walk* with them into this new experience. The partner organization was fully supportive but did not have the ability to financially sustain Tom and Lisa in the new assignment. And the supporters were a mixed bag of people primarily thankful it is Tom and Lisa making this decision and not them.

As Tom and Lisa waded through this sea of responses, they turned to their home sending church. They felt that since the church had sent them out, they would not move forward into this new opportunity without the blessing of the church, and hopefully the full spiritual, emotional, pastoral and financial support of the body they loved and respected.

Tom and Lisa began an intensive process of discernment and dialogue with their home

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church. This process involved the Minister of International Missions, the Senior Pastor, the Missions Committee, their life group, and the rest of the pastoral staff. All parties committed to seek an outcome that would honor God as well as the families and individuals involved.

Throughout this process of discernment and dialogue, a phrase began to mark and define the situation. *Going is easy. Partnering is hard.* This is not to say that sent ones have things easy. It simply affirms that with advancements in technology, travel and even the strength of the dollar in many economies, getting somewhere is not that difficult. Even visas and living arrangements can be navigated with some ease. However, partnering, really bringing people with you and alongside you to share in the vision, is extremely hard. Partnering necessitates trust, clear communication, submission, patience, a multitude of other things, and love.

Nearly nine months after the new opportunity from the Spirit presented itself, Tom, Lisa, and their daughter found their family in a new apartment, in a new country, amongst a new people group. Part of their team didn't make the transition with them and neither did some of their financial or prayer supporters. Their partner organization did greet them with open arms in this new assignment. And their home church gave its blessing and affirmed a trial period for partnership evaluation with this new endeavor.

Fast-forward a year and a half. Tom, Lisa, their daughter and new son are still living out that fresh word from the Spirit. Their team has grown. They are receiving short-term teams from their home church as well as ongoing emotional, spiritual, pastoral and financial support. They are widely casting vision for their new country and people group. They are living proof that going is easy but partnering is hard. It is a difficult but rich experience.

### REFLECT #1

1. How does a group of people hear clearly from the Lord when they are separated by miles, time zones, cultures and day-to-day experiences? In what ways can you encourage and nurture the process of discernment to unify yourself with your sending church?
2. What would you have done had you been in leadership at the church when Tom and Lisa came forward with this fresh word? How would you have tried to balance your commitment to the original strategic people group adoption with your relationship and love to this family?
3. Should vision for the church's global engagement be driven primarily within pastoral staff or determined by those scattered around the world?
4. Meditate on the suggestion – "going is easy but partnering is hard". What is your response?
5. Should the church foster partnerships with people (sent ones) or with people groups as they become strategically involved amongst the nations? What are the benefits and drawbacks to each form of partnership? Where do you fit in this partnership spectrum?

## CULTIVATING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH A SENDING CHURCH

I have been married almost eight years, but I still remember the first day I met my wife. It was just before fall classes started at Baylor University. I was dropping off my drum set at our church, and Holly was there helping with setup for the new school year. I definitely took note of who she was, but I didn't ask her to marry me that day. In fact, I didn't even ask her out for another six months. And once we started dating, it was another two and a half years before we got married.

All too often people hoping to be sent on mission go out looking for a church that will fall in love with them at first sight, pop the question, and live happily ever after with them. I am not

going to deny that such a course of events might actually happen, but I do want to recommend another path, a path that I feel strengthens the relationship and offers a better likelihood of a long-term “happily ever after.”

Now I want to look at specific ways you can cultivate your relationship with a sending church through **presence, people, and service.**

### **Presence**

When I use the word presence, I mean far more than attendance. Many people attend churches without ever being present at church. When I speak about presence, I mean an active engagement and participation. You don’t cultivate a relationship just by being a warm body in a room.

You cultivate a relationship by sharing life with other people, by getting to know their quirks, their likes, even what makes them laugh or cry. This kind of cultivation happens in small groups, life groups, Bible studies, vacation Bible school, prayer meetings, barbeques, pot-luck dinners and even through sitting down over a cup of coffee.

The presence I am talking about communicates to those at your sending church that you value them for who God has created them to be. You don’t simply value them as potential prayer supporters or financial supporters. That is a very selfish way to view the bride of Christ. Instead, through an active and engaging presence, you communicate love and value. When people are feeling loved and valued, they are cultivating a rich relationship. This kind of relationship takes time. This doesn’t happen by popping in. It happens through a shared season of life.

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### **People**

For many people, the church has become such an institution that we often forget to see it as a living organism that is the active collection of many individuals and families. As you cultivate a relationship to your sending church, you must focus on the individuals and families that make up the larger organism.

But where do you start? Some churches have thirty people while others have several thousand. You don’t have to know every cell in the body, but it helps to cultivate relationship throughout the body. This seems to work best when you start where you are. Begin where you feel most natural and push out from there. Start with your peer group and then follow those relationships into other relationships. Chase connections where the door is already cracked open. This is as simple as allowing friends to introduce you to other friends.

There is another component of this side of cultivation that requires greater intentionality. You need to cultivate relationships with the people who are decision-makers and leaders within your community. This would include the pastoral team, elders, deacons, committee leaders and even Bible study teachers. Reach out to these people and make yourself available. Get to know who they are and what their passions are. In the process, help them understand who you are and what you sense the Spirit doing in your life. Pour into life with the people and allow the people to collectively respond to you as the church.

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### Service

People looking to be “sent” may often seem to be those who want to serve *over there* and not those who want to serve *right here*. This statement is in no way meant to diminish the strategic importance of serving over there or to affirm the cry of the deacon on the back row shouting, “there is plenty to be done right here in our town.”

I want to suggest that when you serve right where you are, you say with your life that you are stewarding well what God has put before you. You are not saying, “When I get *over there* then I will really be in the thick of what God has for me.” Instead, you are saying, “God has me here now, so I will serve *right here* until he leads me somewhere else.” Cultivating your relationship to your sending church looks like being a part of work days, VBS, teaching kid’s choir, helping with RA’s, GA’s, AWANA’s, volunteering in the nursery or helping out with other special events. Serving alongside other people in this manner is a great way to cultivate relationships.

#### REFLECT #2

1. Where do you think you are in cultivating a relationship with your sending church?
2. Do you enjoy being around the people at your church and do they enjoy being around you? Would others say that you value them?
3. Are you in relationship to the decision-makers and leadership in your church? Do you respect them? Do they respect you?
4. How are you serving your church?
5. Would you be willing to share life with your sending church for five years if that’s what it would take for them to send you overseas for five years?

## DEFINING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH A SENDING CHURCH

As I said before, Holly and I dated for two and a half years before we got married. During that time, we were engaged for six months. Through those months and years, we fleshed out much of how we expected our relationship to look. All of that culminated in a marriage ceremony on a hot June Saturday in Missouri. At that time, we defined and celebrated before God, family, and friends the nature of our relationship. We didn’t say everything about our relationship in our vows, but we set forth the guiding principles that would mark our relationship. In much the same way, you as a candidate need to define your relationship to your sending church. It may be most appropriate to think of this as laying out the commitments of your sending church to you as a candidate and your own commitments as a candidate to the church. You don’t have to exchange rings, eat cake or throw rice, but it might not hurt.

Before we get started, it is important to note that no two relationships between church and candidate will be identical. Each relationship is shaped and influenced by the people and circumstances involved. What follows is are some guidelines to help you navigate the relationship.

### Commitment of the Sending Church

Most churches have unfortunately fallen into the habit of outsourcing their mission sending. They have used organizations, denominational boards, and other para-church groups to handle most of the details related to a person living and serving cross-culturally. As a result, the commitment of the sending church has been relegated to a lowest common denominator of commitment. This base level of commitment typically involves some sort of pastoral or

committee affirmation of a candidate, a financial commitment to an agency or denomination, and general prayer support.

While this is not a bad place to start, it is far less than a responsible response from a church committed to sending well. Where is the training in this scenario? Where are the follow-up and ongoing support of a candidate? Where are the member care and crisis support structure? Where are the teams from the sending church to help meet critical needs in specific areas of service on the field? Where are the individuals and families who will continue to spread and cultivate the vision within the sending church once the candidate is gone? And where is the focused and specific prayer that will be critical to sustain the candidate when he or she is in the thick of Kingdom activity?

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A church committed to sending well must answer these questions as well as address an ever-growing list of issues. In short, the commitment of a sending church must be marked by pastoral commitment and grassroots member commitment both to the mission candidate and to the work it will be involved in. This commitment should include spiritual, pastoral, emotional, psychological and logistical components. It should involve a commitment to do all that is possible on the front end in preparation as well as the commitment to walk through the ever-changing and evolving situations that will develop on the field and in the life of the candidate.

The commitment of the sending church cannot be viewed responsibly as minimum requirements. Rather, this commitment should be viewed as a gateway of affirmation that will lead to an ever-increasing and deepening relationship.

### **Commitment of the Candidate**

As churches have outsourced their mission sending efforts and gravitated towards a minimum effort in sending, missionaries have fallen into the trap of gravitating towards a minimal relationship to their sending churches. In my experience, many of the cross-cultural workers/missionaries on the field I talk to get tongue-tied when I ask about their home church. The truth is, many of them do not have a home fellowship. Either through their lack of cultivating and nurturing a relationship, changes in church leadership and pastoral team, or even their own long tenure on the field, most relationships between these workers and their sending churches fizzle out after a couple years if not sooner. This is unacceptable. Shame on the church and shame on the candidate. As a candidate though, you can help counter this trend through the nature of your commitment. Answer these questions to gauge your commitment to your sending church as a candidate.

- How often and through what medium will I stay in touch with my sending church?
- How often will I come back to visit and for how long?
- How many short-term teams or interns am I willing to host on the field?
- What elements of membership and training am I willing to go through to communicate my commitment to my sending body?
- What families and individuals am I casting vision with before I relocate to ensure that vision and passion doesn't leave with me on the plane?

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- In what ways will I go the extra mile to involve my sending church in the decision-making and discernment process on the field?
- Am I willing to educate and bring people along in the process who don't get it yet?

In answering these questions, you will be well on your way in evaluating your commitment as a candidate. Don't fall into the trap of meeting minimal requirements. Again, this is a journey and a process you are involved in. At times you will feel tempted to treat it like an employer/employee relationship but push back when those feelings emerge. There is need to define expectations and clarify commitments before you leave for the field, but there is an even greater need to commit to a growing and stretching relationship in years to come. Think long-term and lay the foundation necessary to get there.

1. Have you had a DTR (define the relationship) meeting with your pastoral leadership team? Advocates? Supporters? If not, what is hindering that conversation?
2. What are your top three expectations of your sending church? What is your sending church's number one expectation for you? What are you doing to ensure you meet that expectation?
3. Are you deep enough into a relationship with your sending church to be asking them for commitments? If not, where are you in that relationship?
4. What medium (email, phone calls, letters, visits) will be most effective in communicating your ongoing commitment to your sending church? What will most honor and strengthen that relationship?

## GOING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SENDING CHURCH

The day after we got married, Holly and I left for the Georgia Coast on our honeymoon. Rings were on our fingers, the ceremony was over, the cake had been eaten and the car had been decorated and driven off into the sunset. Now it was time to spend a week on an island relaxing and enjoying being married.

The time will come for you to leave your sending church. You will have defined your relationship, raised your funds, clarified strategy, cultivated prayer partners, enlisted advocates, and hopefully had people pray over you and lay their hands upon you in affirmation of what the Spirit is doing. You will get on a plane, find your seat, and fly right into the thick of what God has in store. You may or may not be physically alone when you get on that plane. Certainly, there will be other passengers, but I pray there will also be teammates alongside you. But even if there is not a person you know or recognize close by, don't forget that you are taking your church with you as you go.

I know this may sound mystical or phony, but it is true. This is God's intent. This is what the Spirit can accomplish if you will allow it. This is what Christ made possible. As you go, go richly. Bring with you the church Christ has appointed for you. Don't for a minute fall prey to thinking you are all alone or that nobody loves you. That kind of thinking is inexcusable for someone sent out by the Spirit and in partnership with the bride of Christ. You go in power



and you do not go alone. Enjoy the honeymoon and then walk day by day in relationship to your sending church.

**REFLECT #3**

1. Do you think of yourself as going alone or going with your sending church? Describe your feelings.
2. What will you do to prevent yourself from falling into the “woe is me” trap of thinking you are all alone on the field?
3. How will you celebrate your relationship with your sending church while you are on the field?
4. What kind of anniversaries or special occasions do you want to acknowledge in years to come?
5. When you think of the first person from your sending church you would want to visit you on the field, who would that be and why would you want them to visit? Have you asked them to come yet?

**BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF A CHURCH THAT SENDS WELL?**

**Reflections on Acts 13:2-3**

*“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”*

I am fascinated by this passage. Not just because it sets in motion one of the greatest ministry duos (the Batman and Robin of the early church), but also because it makes me wonder about the nature of this early Christian community and the responses of Paul and Barnabas to the Spirit and church’s affirmation.

Let’s start with the church. You have a group of people in the habit of worship and fasting. These disciplines, these postures, allow them to hear corporately and clearly from the Spirit. Not only do they hear from the Spirit, they turn around and act on what they have heard.

That is the kind of faith community I want to be a part of. I want to live amongst people in the habit of worshipping the Lord and asking him to speak, but even more, I want to live in the midst of a community that ACTS on what it hears from the Lord. I want to live amongst a body of believers who look at the other followers around them and calls out and names how the Spirit is working in others’ lives and then calls them to obedience and service. When that kind of active obedience in faith marks a church, I am certain that the rest of what is needed to send well will follow suit.

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*I WANT TO LIVE AMONGST PEOPLE IN  
THE HABIT OF WORSHIPPING THE  
LORD.*

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Now to Barnabas and Saul. These two are not backseat players in the church. They were part of the leadership, the cream of the crop. And yet the church sets them apart and sends them. What a confident bride. The other thing I love about these two is that we really don’t know what the initial expression on their faces was.

Were they excited? Scared? Hoping it would have been someone else? None of that is likely, but I like the idea that they were kind of excited and humbled all at the same time. And that regardless of their personal initial reactions, they trusted the community they shared life with and honored God’s ability to speak through that gathered group.

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And then there are the hands and prayers in this passage. What a gift God has given us in laying hands on people and praying over them. It is one of the purest and most engaging forms of worship in the church. For when we lay hands upon someone we join ourselves to them. We lay upon them our commitment, our prayers, our love, our support, our very selves. And in some mystical way, we say to them, “We send you and we go with you as well.”

### REFLECT #4

1. What role has your sending church played in your own understanding of your call to go and serve?
2. Are you praying and fasting regularly with people from your sending body? Why or why not?
3. To what degree do you trust your community to speak the words of the Spirit into your life?
4. How do you anticipate your church will commission you? Have you talked with them about this worship experience?
5. In what ways are you actively listening to the Spirit’s words into your life on behalf of or as it affects others?

## EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

Opportunities for the local church to be tangibly involved in the sending process are bound only by the creativity and commitment of that body. There are the foundational elements like prayer, training, commissioning, partnering and member care. And then there are creative elements that will be largely shaped and molded by the individual personality of the local body. Here are a few examples of how the local church has been involved.

### **Baby Showers Across the Distance**

An experience of the First Baptist Church of Woodway, Waco, Texas

Megan and Jim had been living overseas in a Central Asian community for about two years when they found out they were pregnant. They had stayed in faithful contact with their sending church, so a specific Sunday school class received news of the pregnancy with much the same joy as the couple’s actual parents did. It was as if the men and women in this Sunday school class saw themselves becoming grandparents through this young couple. It was a rich connection.

These feelings of love for the young couple and their baby-to-be turned towards the tangible idea of a baby shower. How do you host a baby shower when the mother- and father-to-be live in Central Asia and the Sunday school class lives in Texas? Well, you have to get creative.

Nancy and Marilyn stepped forward with a great idea. They suggested that the women in the class meet for lunch one day, go out shopping for baby presents, go back to someone’s house for dessert and typical shower fare, show everyone what they bought, take pictures, pack it all up, and send it to Megan and Jim in Central Asia. And that is just what they did. The party had all the excitement and joy of a typical baby shower, but the mother-to-be was half a world away. But the story doesn’t end there.

About three weeks after the cake had been eaten, gifts shown off, pictures taken and everything packed up and committed to the postal service, a knock came at an apartment door in Central Asia. Megan answered and saw two huge boxes before her. With all the appropriate joy and pride of a mother- and father-to-be, she and Jim opened the presents and smiled and cried as each bottle, blanket, and outfit emerged from the boxes.

A baby shower isn't deeply theological. I doubt that you will hear much talk about it in missiological journals. But for a couple in Central Asia and their sending church, it was an amazing experience. It was a testimony to the fact that the church was engaged and cared.

### Companion Fares

An experience of Cottonwood Baptist Church, Dublin, Texas.

Why is it that we usually say goodbye to missionaries at our church or at the airport? Isn't there a better way to see them off? The people at Cottonwood certainly felt there was.

As they prepared to send one of their own overseas, they contemplated the best way to get her to East Asia and settled in. Then it occurred to them, "Why don't we send a family with her for a week or two to springboard her into her new community?" And that is just what they did.

When it was time for her to move to East Asia, she didn't get on the plane alone. She got on with two close friends from her home community. They weren't going for the long haul, but they would be there for the long flight and for the initial days of settling in. So not one but three traveled together. These friends were able to carry extra suitcases and to tangibly communicate that this missionary was not alone in her long journey.

As these friends returned home, they did so like parents who had just dropped their child off at college. They had made the journey and had seen where she would be living. They had first-hand experience to share with the sending community back home. They returned as better advocates and their friend in East Asia was the recipient of far more than a wave at the airport.

### Poem for a Friend

There are often many scriptures shared and personal remarks made at commissioning services, but what of poetry? We are typically a bit guarded to express our more personal feelings in such a way. This was not the case for a friend of Adoniram Judson. The following is a poem addressed to him and his wife upon their departure for Burma.

#### *We Will Not Say Farewell*

*We may not tell you what we feel,  
For words are powerless to reveal  
Love deep as ours to you;  
Love, which no stain of earth can shake,  
Love, pure and holy—for His sake,  
Whose image lives in you.  
We may not praise: we dare not tell,  
The love with which our souls now swell,  
Nor can we cheer your heart;  
But with a power unfelt till now,  
We would call down upon your brow,  
A blessing ere we part.  
We bless you. Feelings long repressed,  
Emotions ne'er before expressed,  
Break from their long control.  
We bless you with no uttered word, —*

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*But Heaven the voiceless prayer has heard—  
The language of the soul.  
We bless you, for the living light,  
Poured upon Asia's starless night,  
Bidding its darkness flee;  
Let future converts tell the rest:  
They bless you, and you shall be blest,  
Through all eternity.  
Farewell! We may not call you ours,  
Beloved from manhood's early hours—  
Your home is far away.  
You are not of us, and your heart  
Even now longs to depart, —  
We would not bid you stay.  
Yet, yet it's hard to let you go,  
Feeling that never more below  
You in our midst may dwell.  
How our spirits do cling to you,  
Though you are taken from our view;  
We will not say Farewell!  
We will go with you. Seas may roll  
Between our homes, but the free soul  
Across their waves shall glide.  
God grant us, when this life is o'er,  
To meet you on a happier shore,  
And still be by your side.<sup>6</sup>*

### **Relationships Reign**

As a friend of mine prepared to return home for a brief stateside assignment from the field, I asked him, “How do you want to connect with the church while you are in town? How can we best serve you in these days?” Without hesitating he responded, “I want to spend my time meeting with small groups of people to pray together about what God is doing in my life and amongst the Turks.”

Our church had sent my friend out along with his family. There was a strong ongoing relationship marked by accountability and support. And so, when he was going to be in town for a while, we didn't have to go over expectations and levels of commitment. We didn't have to spend time reevaluating financial support or goal setting. All of that was already taking place in the natural flow of our relationship. No, when he came through town, we could just immerse ourselves in the practice of prayer and invite others into what God was already doing.

We have talked about cultivating a relationship to your sending church, we have talked about defining and clarifying that relationship and we have talked about living richly out of that relationship. Do you see how they build on one another? Do you see how the sum becomes far greater than the parts? You can't short-change the process and expect the same results. You can't long for the dividend without making the investment.

Going is easy. Partnering is hard. Make no mistake, the effort you will pour into building and

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nurturing your relationship with your sending church will be and should be immense. And hopefully the effort it pours into preparing you and supporting you as a candidate will be immense as well. But it is this great investment that will bind candidate and church for the long haul. It is this great investment that prepares the way for what the Spirit will be released to do in and through this relationship.

Do the hard work now and commit to working hard for years to come. That way, when you come back to the States for a few months every now and then, you will be able to dive into cultivated and nurtured relationships. You won't be starting from the beginning; you will be taking next steps in relationships and furthering impact.

So again, before you end up on the other side of the world, with thousands of miles between you and your sending church, take advantage of the time you have to share life in close proximity. Be present. Connect to people. Serve. Define your relationship to your sending church and outline the expectations for yourself and for the body. That way, when it comes time to go, you will go in confidence that you are not in this alone. May the Spirit guide you through this process with great insight and determination.

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### READ MORE ABOUT

*The Sending Church* by Gordon MacDonald

1. Is there a *compelling sense of sentness* within your church? If yes, what cultivates that? If not, why do you think this is absent from your church?
2. How has the church disappointed you? How have you worked through that in a healthy and redemptive fashion?
3. What role does the Holy Spirit play in your life? How do you anticipate that changing or staying the same as you are sent?
4. What is a tangible way you can *pick up* your sending church?

*Bridge Building to Our Local Church* by Paul Borthwick

1. Have you ever wanted to *bypass* your local church in the sending process? What gave rise to those feelings?
2. How do you plan to address feelings of aloneness on the field?
3. How does what you will be sent to do connect with the larger vision of your church?
4. To whom have you submitted your desire and sense of calling to go overseas? What individuals? Groups? Formally or casually?

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### SELF-AWARENESS, SURVIVAL, AND SOLUTION

Here is a recap of what I believe is vital for you to do as a candidate in relationship to your sending church. This list is not exhaustive, and I am sure you will be able to add critical components that are specific to your context. But this list puts in place a strong foundation for a rich relationship between you and your sending church. Go well.

## SENDING CHURCH

- **Leadership.** You must connect to the leadership of your sending church. This includes pastoral staff, life group leadership, deacons, elders, and others that are key gatekeepers and facilitators for action in your context.
- **Presence.** Work hard at being at your church. Don't think of presence as fulfilling a requirement. Share life with people. Go to potlucks, softball games, prayer meetings, fellowships, and cookouts. Communicate that you value people with your engaged and active presence.
- **People.** Connect to individuals and families. Be personal. Don't think of relating to your church simply as an organization. Think of it as a collection of people that you are tightly linked to in relationship.
- **Serve.** Serve where you are right now. Show people that service is not location specific. If they see you serving well here they may likely better understand why you want to serve over there.
- **Clarify and Define Commitments.** Don't assume everyone is on the same page. Help to spell things out and outline commitments through formal or informal covenants. This applies to your commitments as a candidate and your home church's commitments as a sender.
- **Stay in touch.** Determine and implement a regular flow of communication through appropriate and varied medium. This could involve emails, blogs, newsletters, phone calls or Skype conversations. Be consistent and diverse at the same time. Stay in touch regularly, but don't be afraid to vary the medium of your message. This will help people to hear and listen more effectively.
- **Vision bearers.** Invest in people who will carry on and communicate vision in your absence. This is tough to initiate across the distance. It is much easier to cultivate while you are with people. Invest in those people now and draw on those relationships as you go.
- **Love your Church.** The church is the bride. She may not always act like it, but that doesn't excuse you not treating her as Christ's chosen vessel to partner in His mission within this world. Let your actions and your words build up the bride. Help the bride to become what she is intended to be. Bring the bride along with you in the process; don't leave her behind.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are citizens of a Kingdom that is breaking into the world all around us. We are called to usher in this Kingdom by inviting all people to follow Christ and gather into bodies by advocating for the marginalized, by loving the poor, by welcoming the widows, and by adopting the orphaned.

You have an amazing opportunity to help your sending church understand this role for followers of Christ. As you live in relationship with them, you will have the opportunity to put your fingerprints on the church and they will have the opportunity to put their fingerprints on you. What is more, we know that the Spirit will be in the midst shaping and doing his creative work.

Share life well with your sending church. Push and stretch the relationship. Ask for and bring

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clarity. Endure in prayer and love. And listen and watch expectantly for the activity of the Spirit.

We are a people set apart, a people sent, and we must wisely steward all that is at our disposal to honor our calling. That includes the church. We must engage. We must bear witness to Christ who has transformed our lives and we must seek the justice that echoes in His words for the world around us. Go well, friends.

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### GET STARTED NOW

The ideas we have explored set the bar high for both you and your sending church. Here are some springboards to get you moving in the right direction. Reflect on each of these components and put your thoughts down on paper. Be ready to engage these ideas with your learning community and your sending church.

#### **Imagine**

What will your church look like when you are living on the other side of the world?  
Who will be keeping people up-to-date on how you are doing?  
Who will be casting the vision for your people group or ministry emphasis?  
What will the experience be like for the next individual or family your church sends?

#### **Lifestyle**

Does your lifestyle communicate that you value your sending church?  
Do your time and financial commitments affirm that value?  
When you are sent, how will your lifestyle affirm that you value your sending body?  
In what tangible ways will you communicate that value?

#### **Missional Formation**

You are obviously committed to your own missional formation or you wouldn't be engaging this material.  
But how are you helping your sending church with missional formation?  
How are you helping to shape your pastoral staff's thoughts on missions?  
How are you shaping the thoughts of your life group or Sunday school class?  
How do people think about missions differently because you are in their life?

#### **Language and Customs**

What kind of language do you use when you talk about being sent?  
Is this about what "you" are doing?  
Is it about what "your church" is doing?  
Do your actions and does your language affirm the role and participation of your sending church?  
Switching gears slightly, how is your current experience creating or shaping new customs at your sending church?  
How is your experience impacting the language used to speak about missions within your sending community?

#### **Stretch Life on Life**

How broadly have you communicated your vision and desires within your sending body?

## SENDING CHURCH

Is your reach confined to your tight demographic of circle of friends?  
In what ways can you stretch that influence and impact?

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR *SENDING CHURCH*

Hawthorne, Steven C. "Senders." In *Perspectives*, Chapter 114.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Guder, Darrell. *Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, Roland. *The Spontaneous Expansion of The Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962, iii.

<sup>3</sup> Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*. London: SCM Press, 1977, 64.

<sup>4</sup> Allen, Roland. *The Spontaneous Expansion of The Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Bosch, David. *Transforming Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, 390.

<sup>6</sup> <http://founders.org/journals/>

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