

Eastern Mennonite Missions



Missionary Support Teams

[for long-term missionaries]

“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.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:2-3

Dear partners in mission:

We believe that a missionary does not minister as an unconnected individual, but out of a connected community of faith. Missionary support teams (MSTs) are one significant piece of how we at Eastern Mennonite Missions are working harder at “serving together.”

One MST chairperson has commented:

[Raising support] is also for our benefit... One, we talk to a lot more people about [the missionary’s] work than we otherwise might, and two, we think of her and support her in prayer much more than we might if the funds were all taken care of. This brings about growth in our own spiritual lives.

Strengthened connections among the missionary, the sending churches, and EMM have numerous benefits. Churches are stimulated by greater engagement with the “front lines” of ministry; missionaries experience a broader base of emotional and financial support; and EMM gains increased connections and support, allowing us to invest further in the health of churches and missionaries.

Human Resources
Eastern Mennonite Missions

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WHAT [is a missionary support team?]

The MST ministers to the missionary, vitally linking the missionary with the home congregation(s), EMM, and his or her network of family, friends, and contacts.

An MST is usually a group of six to eight people with a vital interest in missions and in the missionary candidate.

If the missionary has close relationships in more than one congregation, the MST connects people from each congregation to support him or her.

Members of the MST covenant to:

- Encourage/counsel the missionary candidate seeking the Lord's leading.
- Assist in communicating with supporters.
- Pray to undergird both the missionary and the team in mission.
- Work with the missionary to raise funds and take primary responsibility to maintain balances while the missionary serves.



WHO [is on a missionary support team?]

An MST can be made up of people from the missionary's congregation, family, friends, and community.

MST members share responsibilities so that no one is overworked. Following are sample roles; adapt, adjust, and add to them to fit your situation.

Chairperson*: gives administrative oversight.

Church communicator: ensures that two-way communication happens between the missionary and the home congregation.

Newsletter manager: receives and distributes letters from the missionary to supporters.

Pastor or elder: gives spiritual support; connects the MST to the church's leadership.

Prayer facilitator: circulates the missionary's prayer requests and leads prayer network.

Children's peer: if missionary children are old enough to have interested peers, include them in supporting the family.

Treasurer: monitors finances in cooperation with the congregation's treasurer.

[note:]

* The chairperson plays a unique role in helping the MST work together to support the missionary. At first, the MST looks to the missionary for direction, but as soon as possible, the chairperson helps the team take responsibility for meeting the missionary's various needs.



STARTING [the team]

As a potential missionary candidate begins to seek the Lord's leading about the call to service, he or she should:

- Contact someone from congregational leadership, a few spiritually close friends, and family members to pray for discernment. These people could potentially form the core of the missionary support team.

As God leads the candidate to seriously consider service and begin the application process with EMM, he or she should:

- Invite persons to join the MST, beginning to develop the kind of support that will help maintain strong connections to family, church members, and friends.
- Pray with the MST about the possible assignment, the necessary preparations, and sharing the vision for ministry.
- Arrange for the MST to meet with EMM's MST coach and area representative to talk about the MST's role, the missionary's ministry, and how EMM can help support the MST's efforts.
- Meet with the MST treasurer and leaders in the congregation to set up an account for finances, decide how it will be managed, and discuss how the church would like to be involved in financial support. (See the section on Finances, page 11, for more information about how congregations can work with donations for the ministry.) Then, the missionary

candidate should work with EMM to set an initial budget.

- Meet with the MST to plan ways to connect with people through face-to-face presentations, mailings, special events, etc., to raise interest in the missionary and his or her specific mission. Together they should:
 - Develop a list of possible supporters.
 - Develop a support raising plan.
 - Decide how to best communicate the vision.
 - Design printed materials and other items to share vision with potential supporters.
 - Plan special programs or cultural events to share the vision.
 - Talk with church leadership about opportunities to connect with people.

NOTE: These steps may take place before EMM approves a missionary for service, but actual fund-raising should not begin until EMM has appointed the missionary.





DEVELOPING [a prayer network]

Regular, committed prayer is foundational to the missionary's call and ministry.

We suggest that the missionary and MST gather a network of at least 12 persons who feel called by God to intercede for the missionary and the ministry. Because the network does not need to meet together, its members need not be determined by geographic proximity.

Develop the prayer network as early as possible, even as the missionary begins to explore service possibilities.

The MST prayer facilitator serves as a vital link between the missionary and his or her network of prayer supporters. Together, the missionary and prayer facilitator should develop a system for smooth and prompt circulation of prayer items from the missionary to the network. Also remember to include the prayer network in the distribution of regular mailings, such as newsletters. Frequent contact with the network of prayer supporters will position them to intercede more effectively.

In addition to praying for specific items, prayer facilitators can organize people in the network to commit to pray for the missionary on a certain weekday. This way, the prayer network provides support by ensuring that at least one member is praying for the missionary every day.

As you develop plans for strategic prayer coverage, seek the creative inspiration of our infinitely creative God!



WHEN [the missionary is appointed]

After the missionary has been approved for EMM service, the MST has three primary tasks:

Make plans for sharing the ministry vision and information about the service location. Typically, MSTs (together with the missionary):

- Organize one or more cultural theme events to acquaint the church community with the culture where the missionary will minister.
- Research and pray for needs in the outreach location.
- Invite a former missionary or other Christian from the outreach location to share his/her experiences with the home congregation(s).
- Develop brochures, posters, or other informational items to share with people.

Discuss with the missionary what items need to be in place before he or she departs for service. Typically, MSTs:

- Identify ways for the missionary on the field to share information, photos, and other items with the team, for them to share with others.
- Decide how the newsletter will be assembled, copied, and distributed.
- Plan steps toward the missionary's departure, and help with packing and other details.
- Have a "send-off" party and a commissioning service for the missionary.

Take charge of raising finances before the assignment begins. Typically, MSTs:

- Connect family, friends and church members with the missionary's vision, inviting them to participate through financial support
- Connect with people who may not know the missionary but could have an interest in their ministry; then, find ways to introduce the missionary.
- Send "thank you" letters and any other necessary information to those who pledge prayer or financial support.
- Maintain contact between the MST treasurer and the church treasurer to be sure that pledges are coming in as expected, and to send the appropriate amount of funds to EMM.
- Discuss special "thank you" events or ways of showing appreciation to those supporting the missionary with prayers and/or finances.

Funds, whether pledged or contributed, must meet the needs of the established budget before the missionary leaves for assignment.



The MST and the missionary must be committed to staying connected as the missionary serves.

The missionary should:

- Communicate frequently with the MST about his or her expectations and needs, including prayer requests and answers to prayer.
- Help to arrange for service groups from the congregation to come to the outreach location, in consultation with the missionary's field colleagues and EMM.
- Connect with supporters personally once a year to thank them.

The MST should:

- Communicate regularly with the missionary to provide encouragement and connection with events at home.
- Share the missionary's experiences with the congregation and other supporters.
- Circulate prayer requests through the prayer network.
- Continue in prayer for the ministry, the missionary, and the missionary's family.
- Help to arrange any special events or service projects involving the congregation.
- Thank financial supporters and keep them informed about the ministry.
- Identify any shortfalls below the expected budget and contact new supporters to meet the need.

Creativity is an important ingredient in connecting effectively with the congregation, family, and community.



RETURNING [from outreach]

Missionaries often find their transition to the home culture difficult; the MST can help with resettlement details and continue to provide loving support. Typically, MSTs:

- Take time to listen as the missionary shares stories, experiences, and personal changes.
- Help the missionary understand his or her new environment by sharing the changes/struggles in their own lives and the life of the community/congregation.
- Help with physical needs, such as: moving in, finding transportation, shopping, getting utilities connected, and knowing about new businesses.
- Find job opportunities for the missionary.
- Reconnect the missionary with the home congregation; for example, by arranging opportunities to share in small or large groups.



BUDGET [matters]

How EMM, the missionary, and the MST work through budget matters.

- EMM develops a budget that is appropriate for the area of service and as close to actual costs as possible.
- EMM finalizes the budget and determines how much financial support, for each year of service, the MST needs to raise.
- If the assignment's actual costs exceed the amount requested in the budget, EMM covers those extra costs.
- If the actual costs are less than the amount requested by EMM, the extra funds support that region's mission budget.
- If the church receives more funds than the missionary needs according to the budget, the church may consider doing special projects (work teams, pastoral visits, etc.) to support the ministry, in consultation with EMM.
- If the pledged funds don't come in as expected and the MST has difficulty raising the funds, EMM works with the congregation and MST to find a way through the situation.

Contact EMM for more information.



RESOURCING

The MST is a part of a larger team.

EMM will work with the MST and the missionary in these areas.

Prior to the missionary's departure, EMM:

- Defines the location and ministry with the missionary, to guide prayer and communication with interested supporters.
- Organizes training events to prepare the missionary for service, usually during the summer preceding departure.
- Makes staff persons available to work with the MST and the congregation.
- Helps to coordinate departure logistics such as immunizations, travel arrangements, visas, etc.
- Produces prayer cards to help the missionary and MST communicate with supporters.
- Provides additional resources regarding handling contributions and creating communication pieces.
- Offers technical support for some communication media, and offers critical feedback as requested.
- Will receive funds for the missionary if the MST prefers.

During outreach, EMM:

- Provides annual regional retreats to help support the missionary and connect him or her with personnel and the broader vision for that region.

- Designates an on-site Well-Being Advocate to encourage spiritual and emotional growth.
- Through regular evaluations, helps the missionary identify areas of stress and growth.
- Supports the missionary through regular administrative and pastoral visits.
- Trains the MST to help the missionary during the assignment and in the re-entry process.
- Shares workers' stories with the broader church.

Upon the missionary's return from outreach, EMM:

- Conducts a completion interview to evaluate the missionary's time of service and invite feedback about his or her experiences on the field.
- Arranges for counseling when needed.
- Organizes a Re-entry Retreat for returning missionaries, in collaboration with other Mennonite agencies.
- Serves as a resource to the MST for any concerns they express.
- Provides training and resources for the MST on re-entry care.
- Finds opportunities for the worker to share experiences in local churches and schools





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