

Future Directions for Member Care: Integrating New and Old Treasures

*The providence of God has led us all into a new world of opportunity, danger, and duty.
Edinburgh, 1910*

*Human progress is not inevitable; it comes from the tireless efforts of [people] willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time becomes an ally of social stagnation.
Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963*

A member care working group of 15-20 people met in March 2006 as part of a major conference. The conference was attended by some 350 leaders from around the world. It focused on networking together in order to effectively minister among Unreached People Groups (UPGs).

Our purpose in the working group was to: "...discuss, envision, and discern ways to provide and develop (*provelop*) member care resources, on behalf of mission/aid workers who are serving among UPGs. What structures, approaches, and issues do we need to consider, to help these workers remain healthy and effective?"

This summary reflects several thoughts from the working group, expanded with several of my personal suggestions for developing member care. I am especially grateful for the contributions from the other facilitators of our working group as well as the helpful insights of the participants.

One of our guiding principles as a working group was to consider both current and new resources for supporting the *diversity* of mission/aid workers among UPGs. This principle is reflected in Christ's conclusion to the Kingdom parables. "Therefore every scribe that has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of the house that brings from his treasure new things and old things" (MT 13:52). Here now are 12 such treasures—current and future resources—that I believe are crucial for member care.

Treasure 1. Sending Churches and Support Teams—We must embrace the core and Biblical role of the church in both sending and supporting workers. Historically though, this has often not been the case (e.g., often sending agencies have undertaken much of the member care responsibility). Sending churches can support workers in the areas of logistics, finances, prayer, communication, reentry, etc. The sending church, along with "support teams" need to be trained to send well and to serve well. Neal Pirolo's book, *Serving as Senders*, is a superb resource and it has been translated into about 15 languages. Note though that some new ways of "going" do not reflect the usual approaches to "sending" (e.g., Filipino Christians going to the Middle East for employment; Chinese workers with minimal training/support heading "West" with the gospel; Christians living in reached Western countries who minister to UPG neighbours; people creatively ministering to UPGs via the internet). We will thus need to consider additional ways to support these "goers", including the foundational roles for the sending churches/agencies and support teams working together.

Treasure 2. CEOs/Leaders—Loneliness and discouragement occur for most people in leadership. They, like all mission/aid personnel, need supportive member care. An example of an effective resource for leaders is the India Mission Association offering retreats for CEOs and spouses. In addition to its positive impact on leaders, these retreats have also helped open the doors to member care in India—leaders are of course gatekeepers, and what they experience can be passed to staff. Be sure to see K K Rajendran's account about his struggles as a leader in South Asia, in chapter eight of *Doing Member Care Well* (2002). Some excerpts: "It is 12:45 midnight. I toss in bed, pleading for sleep to overtake me...We are asking many questions....These questions meander through my mind and nearly overtake me...I almost panic. It is now 2:30 am...Many CEOs and other leaders have many similar sleepless nights" (pp.77-79).

Treasure 3. Relief/Aid Workers—Psychosocial support is increasingly being recognised as a necessary and ethical organisational resource for workers in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies (CHEs). This support includes debriefing and practical help for relief workers as well as equipping them with trauma/healing skills to help survivors. Many disaster scenarios provide opportunities to interact with UPGs. And eschatologically speaking, CHEs are likely to increase (MT 24, Ps 46). God and humans are surely working together through both secular and Christian NGOs to help our troubled world. One timely resource is the radio programmes that were developed to help survivors of Hurricane Katrina (www.seasonsofcar.org). Radio programmes for discussing the affects of trauma and how to help oneself and others, have been used in many other places affected by natural and man-made mass disasters. I also frequently recommend two publications from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: *Managing Stress on the Field* (2001) and *Psychological Support: Best Practices* (2001) (www.ifrc.org). The following quote is from the later publication. It gets at the relevance of equipping relief/aid workers with psychological skills. It also reflects some of the emotional consequences that can affect workers themselves.

The distinction between psychological needs and other priorities in relief operations is an artificial one, as psychological needs permeate and affect all other aspects such as shelter, food distribution, and basic health care. Provision of traditional relief aid is, therefore, not sufficient. *Neglecting emotional reactions may result in passive victims rather than active survivors* [italics mine]. Early and adequate psychological support can prevent distress and suffering from developing into something more severe, and will help the people affected cope better and return more rapidly to normal functioning (p. 5).

Treasure 4. The Diaspora of Peoples—There are “movements” of people all over the globe. Our human demographics are significantly shifting. Christians would do well to track with such shifts, and seriously consider ministry to those who settle in places where there is a thriving Christian presence. Especially those from UPGs. Another type of “movement” involves “good news sharers” who cross national and continental borders for economic reasons (e.g., Filipino workers), or who flee for safety as part of internationally or internally displaced peoples (e.g., Sudanese Christians). What an opportunity for the church to support people within either of these two types of movements—many who are either from UPGs or else are Christians that could potentially reach out to UPGs. Ministry to the diaspora of peoples may be the most overlooked area of UPG mission/member care.

Treasure 5. Persecuted Believers—Tens of thousands of Christians (and those from other religions) are affected by discrimination, human rights violations, and violence as a result of their faith. There are major emotional consequences to persecution. How can we better support these Christians, as many of them are in strategic proximity/relationship with UPGs. As John Amstutz says in *Humanitarianism with a Point*. “...the place of hospitality and kindness toward followers of Jesus Christ is no small matter, particularly those who are being persecuted for their faith in Him.... [It is time] to speak clearly and fully of the essential need of intentional humanitarianism—member care—toward those who have chosen to suffer loss for Christ in these nations” (*Doing Member Care Well*, 2002 p. 39). Check out the web section for the World Evangelical Alliance’s Religious Liberty Commission (www.worldevangelical.org); and Human Rights Advocacy in Missions (chapter 45) in *Doing Member Care Well* (2002). And finally, consider Brother Yun’s sobering perspective on “persecution and lighter loads” in *Back to Jerusalem* (2003, pp. 57, 58).

The past fifty years of suffering, persecution, and torture of the house churches in China were all part of God’s training for us. He has used the government for His own purposes, molding and shaping His children as He sees fit. That is why I correct Western Christians who tell me: we have been praying for years that the Communist government in China will collapse, so Christians can live in freedom...Instead of focusing our prayers against any political system, we pray that regardless of what happens to us, we will be pleasing to God.

Don't pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects His love and power. This is true freedom!...Hundreds of Western missionaries spilled their blood on Chinese soil in the past. Their example has inspired us to be willing to die for the Lord wherever he leads us with His message.

Treasure 6. Special Support for A4 Workers—Countries from Asia, Africa, Arabic-Turkic, and America-Latina regions (referred to as the *A4 Regions*) are intentionally sending more workers to UPGs. How can they develop member care approaches that fit for them? And how can other sending nations learn from groups in Nigeria, Brazil, The Philippines, Korea, and India for example? We want to provide culturally-relevant, quality care from many sources. The need for quality care is emphasised in a special listing of “15 commitments of Member Care Workers”, which I believe are applicable to most caregivers regardless of their level of training/experience (see “Upgrading Member Care”, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, in press July 2006). The commitment to quality care for A4 workers is also clearly stated in these excerpts from the *Declaration* by the Philippine Missionary Care Congress of October 2005:

...we will foster a culture of care among our churches and mission organizations compliant with the model and mandate of Christ to love and serve each other; we will endeavor to raise awareness about Member Care that would catalyze the Filipino church to harness capacities in order to ensure the flow of care towards those who were sent out;

...we will share knowledge, resources, and personnel; cooperate in stewardship of God’s resources with each other and with the global member care community so that potentials are maximized and excesses are minimized in serving cross-cultural Christian workers;

...we will seek out good practice models of Member Care that are biblically founded, and harness the existing strength of the Filipino culture for missionary care; we endeavor for the cross-cultural Christian workers’ personal growth that includes the nurture of each of their family members;

...we will raise more church leaders and ministers particularly focused on Member Care, adequately equipped and tooled to serve the needs of the Filipino missionary including their families and home-based personnel;

...we will personally engage in caring for Filipino cross-cultural Christian workers- celebrating their joys, sharing in their sorrows, supporting their needs and supplicating for their victory in seeing the unreached peoples coming to Christ. (*Global Member Care Briefing*, February 2006; www.membercare.org).

Treasure 7. Training and More Training— Member care is not just a “specialist” function—something to be only provided by “professionals”. Rather it is essential to further equip various member care workers (MCWs), leaders, senders, and mission personnel themselves with “special” member care skills. These skills help to sustain workers for the long-haul. Strategic, ongoing training is needed all around the world! It includes such areas as: counselling, crisis care/debriefing, organisational systems/dysfunction, interpersonal skills, personnel development, and family/marriage. One course in particular that continues to make its international rounds is the one week intensive “Sharpening Your Interpersonal Skills” (www.itpartners.org). Offering member care-related courses via the internet (e.g., www.headington-insitute.org), and via workshops at conferences, are also good ways forward. For additional information on training, see the calendar on the home page at www.membercare.org; and the member care degree programmes offered at Columbia International University in the USA (www.ciu.edu/seminary).

Treasure 8. Secular Connections—Many MCWs would do well to connect with secular NGOs and human health organisations—their approaches to human resource management, policies, practices, and tools. What can we learn for example, from secular aid workers and other cross-cultural workers? One key document dealing with the management and support of aid workers is the *People In Aid Code of Good Practice* (www.peopleinaid.org). It’s seven principles and various “key indicators” (criteria for determining the extent to which the principles are being followed) have also served as helpful guides to many organisations in mission/aid. See also the web sites for the Society for Human Resource Management (www.shrm.org); and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (www.istss.org).

Treasure 9. Coaching—Coaching is a growing approach for further equipping workers. It focuses on both personal and professional development. Strategy-related coaching has been around for many years (e.g., see the article on coaching in *Missionary Care*, 1992). But what about coaching as a viable means for providing member care also? Why not?! Coaching can occur via face to face, phone, or email contact. Gary Collins sends out regular newsletters with many coaching helps (www.garycollins.com). See also the helpful overview and related materials on coaching: www.c-transformation.com/STADA_booklet.pdf

Treasure 10. Internet Connections—We want to develop our skills to use the Internet well. The internet is now the main source for many who want to stay in touch with the member care field and colleagues, exchange resources etc. Some of the newer skills needed include using voice over internet technologies (VOIP), podcasting, running web sites, and using webcams for consultation. But note that many people—member caregivers and service receivers—do not have inexpensive, reliable, and fast access to the internet, or to computer technology. So the internet is currently still a real luxury item for many. Or possibly not even a “culturally-relevant” means of communication. Two current internet resources are offered by Global Member Care Resources MemCa via their web site (www.membercare.org) and via their *Global Briefing* sent three times a year (contact: 102172.170@compuserve.com).

Treasure 11. Resiliency—Member care seeks to develop strong people who balance the need for support/growth with the reality of sacrifice/suffering. Good member care helps develop resiliency, and the resiliency that workers and teams have will likely be reproduced in the people they are serving. Resiliency is necessary to work effectively in UPG settings, many of which are very demanding. In my experience, both surviving and thriving are realities for Christian workers—and for sure they are my regular “companions” in life. I try not to feel too guilty if I am in more of a “surviving” mode—as if something is wrong with me. Nor do I try to presumptuously relax in a state of overconfidence if I am going through a season of “thriving”. I just try to be grateful. There is an uneven flow to life, and resiliency, like the ability to thrive, is developed through hard times. And hard times never end in this life. Here is a brief quote from *Stress and Trauma Handbook: Strategies for Flourishing in Demanding Environments* (2003). The quote is from the chapter by Dr. Cynthia Eriksson et al p. 95, summarising her research on the adjustment of World Vision aid workers from over 30 countries:

“..for each of the mental health risk adjustment measures (depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and burnout) 30-50 percent of staff scored in the moderate to high-risk range. This is a significant number of people who are working and 'surviving' while experiencing considerable emotional distress. These staff may not be incapacitated by these symptoms presently, but we cannot deny the effects that depression, burnout, and PTSD can have on relationships, work, and personal health. An NGO's commitment to people includes the welfare of beneficiaries around the world, but it also includes the well-being of staff who commit their lives to serving and saving others.” [Note: Also carefully consider the impact of the increasing emotional distress and behavioural dysfunction that lead up to the development of these three disorders!]

So is this figure similar for other organisations? Probably a resounding “yes” for many organisations with staff serving in more volatile areas. One word in particular that catches my attention in the quote above is “surviving.” This study and other research, along with our consolidated member care experience, suggest that many workers may indeed be “surviving” rather than flourishing, due to the demands of their work and the experience of chronic or extreme stressors. Interpersonal friction and poor management practices are key contributors. For Christian workers and other people of faith, this experience of “surviving” is not so much about God's character or His ability to help us. Rather it has everything to do with the realities (consequences) of our following Him into difficult places, plus our being human and responding as normal humans, And it has implications of course for our organisational responsibility to support our workers.

Final Thoughts—Where We Are Heading with our Treasures

Treasure 12. Ethne to Ethne Member Care—We know that there is a purpose to human history, and that there will be a conclusion to this age. We have seen how God is actively involved in history to redeem people from every nation, people, and language (Revelation 5:9,10). It is an “ethne to ethne” strategy, in which believers from different people groups reach out to other people groups, until “all of the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.” The vision is thus for all ethnic groups to be involved in *cross-ethne* mission.

Member care is a service ministry which supports this historical and biblical vision. As an international movement of “reflective practitioners”, the member care community is committed to helping mission workers develop the personal qualities and life skills necessary to work effectively. And this includes mission workers from *all* ethne.

Now let's consider an amazing corollary to this commitment: I would like to suggest that this also means that we are committed to seeing quality member care workers (MCWS) from *all* ethne raised up and trained, including those within/from the A4 regions (Africa, Asia, Arabic-Turkic, and America-Latina). And these MCWs work both within their own cultures *and* cross-culturally. So the focus is both on supporting mission workers, and training others from various cultures to be quality care providers. **Member care, then, is also very much an “ethne to ethne” strategy. It is an ethne to ethne treasure!**

Ethne to ethne member care (E2MC) though is very challenging. What will help facilitate an E2MC movement? It will be important to set up opportunities for colleagues from different cultures to interact with each other (forums, conferences, writing, networks etc.). It will also be important for colleagues with member care training/experience in different cultures/countries, to help facilitate learning and practice as “multicultural bridges”. Multi-cultural Southerners/Easterners who have sojourned for extended periods to the North/West and vice versa, will definitely play key roles. Such multi-cultural learning is a core part of *proveloping* member care well. And it is a two-way street.

E2MC requires the best of our conceptual thinking and research skills; extensive practical experience; a commitment to use transcultural principles (concepts common across cultures, especially ethnic and organisational “cultures”); and lots of personal connections and ongoing relationships with colleagues. Said another way, we as a member care field are heading increasingly towards the reality of “boundaries without borders”—that is we are aware of our personal cultural/disciplinary identities and member care competencies (boundaries) as we intentionally work with those having different geographic/ethnic identities and member care concepts (borders). E2MC challenges us to grow *deeply as persons* as we go *broadly as practitioners* to all peoples.

Above all, the core of E2MC will involve the trans-ethne, New Testament practice of fervently loving one another—like encouraging one another each day; bearing one another's burdens; and forgiving one another from the heart. By this all people will know that we are His disciples. ((John 13:35). The Great Commission and the Great Commandment are inseparable. Our love is the final apologetic. It is the ultimate measure of the effectiveness of our member care.

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