

## **Member Care Interest Group**

### **Mission Africa, Ivory Coast, May 12-16, 2000**

*Prepared by Kelly O'Donnell and Naomi Famonuri*

*Overview: About 20 participants at mission Africa met for eight hours to discuss the needs and care of African mission personnel, share about resources to help missionaries, and to plan some ways to further develop member care resources within/from Africa. Our time together was characterized by open discussion, personal and Biblical examples of needs/care, and a commitment to see missionaries remain healthy, resilient, and effective for their work.*

**Definitions:** Member Care is concerned with developing the whole person, so that we can "win the race" that God has called us to run (I. Cor. 9:24). Spiritual refreshment, mutual support, nurture from sending groups, and special resources (e.g., MK education, pastoral field visits, help with visas, medical consultation) are key aspects of member care. Member care is for all personnel in missions, including field workers, home office staff, and MKs. It is an ongoing investment of resources throughout the "missionary life cycle"--from recruitment through retirement. The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of a person/leader who both gave member care (e.g., I Thes. he describes himself like a mother and father for his disciples) and received member care (e.g., ministry by the household of Stephanas and many others to him (I. Cor. 16).

**Issues/Needs:** Our Group discussed the needs of missionary children (especially education), appropriate infrastructures to support/care for missionaries, teaching the local church to send/support/receive missionaries, strategies for selection and field care, commitment to lifelong learning and ongoing development, interpersonal conflict, and spiritual warfare. We concluded that in general, current member care approaches and resources are seriously lacking for African mission personnel. Hence a concerted, collaborative effort is necessary to help insure that our personnel are healthy, resilient, and effective for the long-term. Participants received a special set of handouts (60 pages) which included brief articles and tools for member care ("Doing Missions Well: member Care Within and from Africa"). This is available through the AEA office in Nairobi (electronic and hard copies--AEA@maf.org) and through Kelly O'Donnell (electronic copies only--102172.170@compuserve.com).

**Future Directions:** We made several suggestions as a result of our discussion and prayer.

- Officially form and launch the Member Care Track of the Evangelism and Mission Commission of the AEA--to continue to assess and discuss issues/resources for care.
- Work through national mission associations and the AEA to help develop member care.
- Encourage the formation of interest groups/task forces within agencies/associations.
- Do workshops/plenaries, interest groups, and consultation at national/regional gatherings.
- Maintain good communication about member care--distribute this summary and the description of the Member Care Track; use and be part of the email forum of Member Care--Europe to exchange updates about member care news within Africa--Harry Hoffmann: hoffmannht@compuserve.com; include short articles in the AEA's Afroscope.
- Offer special training and networks of trainers for different regions: interpersonal skills workshop (Jim de Vries and associates); crisis/contingency management (Karen Carr/Darlene Jerome--kfcarr@aol.com); member care/personnel development overview
- (Kelly O'Donnell--102172.170@compuserve.com); and family/MK life.

## **Cameroun Member Care Consultation**

*Naomi Famonure August 2001*

My heart is bubbling with excitement as I write this from Cameroun where the Bible and Missions conference has been going on and the Member Care consultation running side by side with it. The meetings have been great with tremendous results. This is the first of the regional consultations and I tell you it was a huge success.

You needed to hear the pathetic cry for member care from the participants. It was all agreed that this consultation was timely. Some leaders came for the consultation because they were hoping to take back answers to their agencies or denominations and to be able to deal with the issues at hand back home. Some are losing good workers and they can't explain why. Now they know I think.

From the general responses from the participants at the Consultation, issues pointed out included the following:

1. the need for Member Care is really the need of the hour.
2. missionaries who evangelised us from the west did not teach us how to care for our own missionaries, and where they did the structures left behind were too bogus for us to implement.
3. the challenge for us in Africa was that there was no proper orientation to take over the work in missions.
4. the Church is too weak financially to care for missions.
5. children are usually not a factor to be reckoned with, etc.

Others include:

- the realization that the Church in the Central African region as a whole needs to be adequately taught in missions. Most Bible schools and theological seminaries where pastors are trained do not have missions included on the curriculum. What pastors understand as missions is not really missions. And one cannot teach what one does not have or know.
- others feel that because there is unfaithfulness in handling Church finances many who would have given in support of missionaries and evangelists do not give. In other quarters where Christians would have given normally have not been taught to give for fear of losing them as converts.
- tribalism according to others is a problem that will/may hinder effective member care in the sense that some Christians may not give in support of a missionary who is not from their tribe even if he is from the same local church or denomination.

Many of the participants, in fact most, were pastors involved or getting involved with missions. Unfortunately many of them understood member care only in terms of financial and/or material support of the missionary. I believe this will change with time and with concerted education.

So for now we have a Member Care committee made up of nine members from 3 countries for the central African region. They already had a meeting during the conference and will meet again in October in Tchad to put some plans on ground including setting up a Member care team of professionals.

**One of the events held in view is an awareness seminar for missions and denominational leaders. The bottom line has always been the need for leaders to understand member care issues and to desire to address them. This event is being proposed for July 2002 in Cameroun.**

**It is a pity those who registered to attend from Central Africa Republic could not come because of the attempted coup in the country. So because of the uncertainty they were not sure it was safe to travel. But I know they are very much keen on Member Care issues.**

**I am still talking with missions leaders in the West African region. What I am thinking right now is a Member Care consultation and some form of training for the sending countries only. I am thinking of either Ghana or Nigeria as venue sometime between February and April 2002.**

**I think generally the awareness is being created though slowly. Initially leaders thought we were advocating pampering measures for missionaries (like material provisions for example) which they fear will extinguish the life of faith in the missionary. But some are beginning to understand that it is not just that, but that there is more to member care than that.**

**A leader of one of the leading missions agencies in Africa was a participant and a resource person at the conference and as reports of the Member care was filtering and floating around he was full of regrets for not getting his personnel manager to attend the consultation.**

**I hope to do a short report of this consultation to send to missions leaders within the continent.**

**Well, I believe you held us in prayers during these days and want to thank you for praying. Please do continue to pray until we see definite things happening in this area of missions in Africa.**

**Naomi Famonure**

**Member Care Track Coordinator**

**EMC/AEA**