

## When Missionaries Come to Town



How to make the most of home-assignment visits

*By Ellen Livingood*

Brief home-assignment visits can leave missionaries and churches feeling disconnected. Real relationships require more than a quick Sunday-school update and a "Moment for Missions" report in the worship service before saying good-bye for another two to four years. What's the solution when missionaries' time is limited?

Better planning can help churches and global workers maximize the impact of even short visits. In this *Postings* are suggestions for both churches and missionaries as well as a

**customizable planning tool** (pp. 4-6) to clarify goals and make the most of your days together.

The ideas we offer here are designed primarily for "supporting churches"—those that contribute prayer and finances but don't have the role of sending congregation. A "sending church" will want to do much more to facilitate their workers' entire time of home assignment.

We hope these ideas will help you make the most of every missionary visit.

### Suggestions for Churches

#### 1. Start planning early.

Don't wait for your missionaries to contact you. Annually ask all of your global workers if they will be coming on home assignment during the next year. If the answer is yes, set up a time and duration for their visit as far ahead as possible. This confirms your interest in them and facilitates adequate planning.

#### 2. Encourage missionaries to spend as much time as possible with you.

Let them know up front that you are excited about their coming and want to work with them to make it a highly productive time. We have developed a [planning tool](#) that will guide your missions team to help everyone prepare and

communicate. Create a sheet for each visit and review it with your missionaries to forge plans in advance. Don't assume they know what you want them to do. Suggest ministry opportunities, then ask for their feedback and adjust the plan.

#### 3. Underwrite the cost of your workers' visits.

Travel can be very expensive, and many missionaries on home assignment use rental cars for which they pay mileage as well as gas. The cost of meals on the road and nights in hotels adds up. Most workers do not have funds in their account to cover these expenses. If visiting your church requires flying, clarify in advance that you will cover the cost of the tickets. Don't expect missionaries to visit if they have to invest a hefty amount of the support you give them to come see you. Be generous!

## 4. Include activities that are fun and refreshing.

Ask ahead of time what your global workers would enjoy doing. Each missionary is different. Our [planning tool](#) offers some idea starters.

## 5. Throw a party!

Well, at least sponsor a potluck and invite the entire congregation. If a Sunday school class or small group is particularly interested in these workers, ask them to organize the event but consider including everyone. Ask your missionaries for an email list of those in your congregation who have been receiving their updates, then personally invite them and anyone else you know who has been involved in their ministry. You may want to ask your missionaries ahead of time to write up a “teaser paragraph” that will stimulate curiosity about what they will talk about. Circulate this on email or publish it in the bulletin to spark additional interest.

## 6. Feature your missionaries' strengths.

Your job as missions leaders is to engage the communication methods that will best showcase your global workers' message. If this is a couple, consider the speaking gifts of both husband and wife. Who is the most articulate speaker? Many churches find that the most important information can be conveyed succinctly when missionaries are asked [specific questions](#) in an interview format. If workers are most comfortable with small groups, concentrate on creating lots of those opportunities.

## 7. Let MKs make their own choices.

Ask parents what would make their children feel comfortable and welcomed. Some kids may choose to stay with parents; others may love to blend in with other children/teens of their own age. Few like to be singled out as unique. Offer options but never pressure participation.



## 8. Listen well.

Your missionaries may enjoy hearing about the exploits of your local Little League team or how plans are coming along for the church expansion project. But it is more important for you to ask questions that help you really know your missionaries, the people they work with, and their ministry. Global workers long to have people share their passion for fulfilling the Great Commission. This is especially essential in the GO team's interview. Make sure to listen to their heart. You may discover that your global workers need additional [levels of missionary care](#). Even if yours is not the sending church, you may need to step into the gap to minister to hurting workers. Remember that they have been on the front lines and probably have returned with battle wounds.

## 9. Clarify and pursue strategic goals.

Do you have a clear idea of what you would like God to do in your church as a result of your missionaries' visit? Has your GO team/missions committee defined how they would like to see vision increase, focused prayer be encouraged, or a short-term team developed as a result?

Share with your missionaries what you are asking God to do through their time with you. Discuss the best way to influence the most people. Prayerfully seek to identify those in your congregation whom God might want to connect to these particular missionaries. Bring these people together with your missionaries in comfortable, informal settings.

## 10. Involve the not-yet-interested.

Don't just ask missions enthusiasts to provide housing or meals for your missionaries. Instead, try to recruit those who have never shown missions interest. And don't be discouraged by “no” answers. Ask the same people again the next time missionaries visit. Eventually they will say “yes,” and who knows what God will do! If potential hosts are nervous that they won't know what to talk about, give them a few questions to ask to get them past their fears that the conversation will lag.

Read our related **Worth Considering...** blog entitled, [“Localizing Missionary Support.”](#)

## Suggestions for Missionaries

### 1. Set specific goals for each church visit.

Sometimes it is easy to treat all churches alike, but every congregation is unique. As you plan, consider what you know about the church's understanding of, and heart for, missions. Pray about what you could say that not only highlights your ministry but expands their missions vision. Dialog with the church's missions leadership ahead of time about what you and they would like to accomplish. You may wish to send them this *Postings* to help the church think more strategically about your visit.

### 2. Don't just hang out with the missions gang.

The missions committee may be eager to engage all of your available time, but challenge them to consider a different strategy. What could happen if you prioritized time for strategic conversations with "Matt and Marti" church members who do not (yet!) have a high missions interest?

Determine the best setting for such interaction. Perhaps "Terry" the missions team leader could invite Matt and

Marti and you for lunch downtown. Plan carefully how you will share without overwhelming your new friends. Your lunch discussion can also give Terry some ideas of how he can share his missions passion with others.

### 3. Be proactive about recruitment conversations.

Ask the church's missions leaders if they can suggest the names of several people who might be willing to consider a missions internship, short-term assignment, or career missions. See if you can schedule individual, informal meetings with these people—maybe coffee at Starbucks or pizza after

the church's softball game. Simply share your own story, then challenge them to consider what God might have as their next step in global engagement. As Chris from Hill Country Bible Church recommends, "[Just ask!](#)"

### 4. Share simple prayer techniques and requests.

Many believers you will encounter have no idea how to pray meaningfully for missionaries. They may have heard few stories of specific answers to prayer for God's work on the front lines. Share what God has taught you about praying for those in spiritual darkness. Describe one or two practical

ideas of how to build intercession into daily life. List key prayer requests that can be remembered through an easy acronym—maybe one request for each letter of your name.

### 5. Ways people can use their skills to help you.

What [contribution](#) could a short-termer make in a week, six weeks, or six months on your field? What could someone do to assist you on home assignment? Is there some type of expertise you wish you could tap into via a Skype call from time to time? Make a list of every practical service you can think of. Share

it with the missions leadership, interested individuals, small groups, etc. People want to help. Even simple things can begin a long-term, highly fruitful partnership.

### 6. Take the lead in conversations.

Some missionaries express discouragement when church visits are dominated by superficial conversations and unfocused questions. Yet many church attendees have no idea what to ask. Raise the quality of dialog by suggesting [discussion questions](#) for formal interviews or even for informal dinner conversations that focus on the information you most want to convey.



Make a list of every practical service you can think of...  
People want to help.



## Your Missions Planning Tool

# Planning Sheet for the Home-Assignment Visit of \_\_\_\_\_ [missionaries] with \_\_\_\_\_ [church]

### Visit Logistics →

Date(s) of visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time of arrival: \_\_\_\_\_

Check if you will need airport pickup

Date/Time of departure: \_\_\_\_\_

Number/Ages of family members coming with you: \_\_\_\_\_

Will you need housing?  Yes  No. If yes, do you have any special needs or preferences?

Unless noted below, we will assume that breakfasts will be provided by your overnight hosts, and we will plan lunches and dinners for you with various members of the congregation. Informal conversations over meals are often the most effective part of missionaries' ministry with us!

Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner slots during your stay with us we should not schedule:

Does anyone coming on this visit have any special dietary needs or preferences?

### Ministry Goals →

We are eager to hear from you. Please:

- ✓ Update us about the people God has called you to serve to reinforce our vision for the ministry purposes we share with you there.
- ✓ Report on your personal ministry since you were last here.
- ✓ Describe specific ways God answered our prayers for you.
- ✓ Summarize plans and goals for the future.
- ✓ List key prayer requests.
- ✓ Share a more in-depth update with our GO Team/Missions Committee on ministry impact, personal and family spiritual/emotional/physical health, important projects, support needs, any potential major changes, etc.

Check any of the following that are also goals for your time with us:

- Meet with individual supporters in the area.
- Discuss the possibility of our sending short-termers to serve with you in the future.
- Seek additional  monthly personal support or  project funding.
- Meet with individuals to challenge them to consider joining your field team or serving somewhere in missions. (If this is a goal, please share more specifics about what roles you are looking to fill.)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

*continued*

## Planning Sheet / Page 2

**Ministry While You Are Here** 

*Church: Copy and repeat the box below for each meeting.*

Here are the ministry opportunities we have in mind. We want to hear any suggestions you have. Please feel free to recommend how we can help you make these presentations most valuable. If there are contexts in which you are not comfortable sharing, please tell us. If there are additional settings in which you would like to share, we would also like to hear that. If you need more information, let us know.

**Type of meeting:**

Date/Time:

Location:

If this is a couple, who will present, or is it their choice?

Type of presentation:  Ministry update,  Personal testimony,  Devotional,  
 Sermon,  Interview,  Informal interaction,  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Age group and any other pertinent characteristics of the group:

Approximate number attending:

Length of presentation:

Will this group have already heard any other presentations?


For the missionary to complete: Will you be using video and/or PowerPoint?  Yes  No  
 If yes, what equipment do you need the church to provide?

*Repeat above box as often as needed.*

**Leadership Connections While You Are with Us**

**GO Team/Missions Committee:** We would like to meet with you at [date/time/place] for [anticipated length of time]. Is this convenient for your schedule?

**Senior Pastor:** We would also like you to meet with our senior pastor. He is available at [date/time/place] for [anticipated length of time]. Is this convenient for your schedule?

**Serving You While You Are Here** 

We would like to offer you any of the following services while you are with us. Please indicate what you would like to take advantage of. Feel free to choose lots of options—5 or 10 is not too many! Add details that will help us customize our services to your needs.

- Car tune-up
- Tickets to a sports event: (type) \_\_\_\_\_
- Tickets to a concert: (type) \_\_\_\_\_
- Tickets for the family to a nearby theme park
- Local sightseeing day with one of our members (describe any specific interests)

*continued*



## Planning Sheet / Page 3

**Serving You While You Are Here (cont.)**

- Attend a professional seminar at our expense (*Church leaders: Ask your pastor and/or other missionaries what relevant conferences are occurring in your area and list options for your missionaries. Or suggest a \$ amount you will give for them to attend any conference of their choice.*)
- One session\* with a financial planner
- One session\* with an attorney
- One session\* with an educational specialist: (type) \_\_\_\_\_
- One session\* with a counselor: (type) \_\_\_\_\_
- One session\* with a personal fitness trainer
- Guest pass(es) to a local gym
- Computer evaluation and/or technology consultation
- Training session on computer software: (name program) \_\_\_\_\_
- Dental cleaning(s)
- Hair cut:  Man  Woman  Child (# \_\_\_)
- Massage
- Manicure/Pedicure
- Shopping trip with spending money. For women, would you prefer to (a) shop on your own or (b) be accompanied by another woman or (c) by a woman and her daughter of a similar age to your children?
- Childcare so parents can have a  day  evening without the kids
- Church: Include other services you would like to make available and delete those you cannot offer.*

\* If additional sessions are needed, we will be happy to evaluate with you how the costs can be covered.

**Other** 

Please share with us any additional ways that we could make your time with us refreshing for you and of maximum impact on our congregation.

**Return this form to [name] at [email address] as soon as possible so that we can prepare well for your visit.**

**Download this form as a [Word document](#).** Customize for your situation and delete italicized directions before sending.

**Interchange Postings**

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