

Starting a Relationship with a Mission Co-Worker

How to Find a Mission Co-Worker

If your church doesn't have a mission committee already, form one. Have the group discern which mission co-workers fit with the interests and the faith life of your congregations. Go to <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries.find-mission-worker>, read the biographies and letters, and you'll get a sense of how (and how often) particular mission co-workers talk about their call and witness. Please understand that about 10% of our mission co-workers are not on the web for security reasons. If you are interested in supporting a co-worker in a sensitive area, please contact KT Ockels, 1-800-728-7228, ext. 5977, kt.ockels@pcusa.org.

Be patient. There's a lot to explore: about 5,000 letters, with 600 or so added every year, and at least that many photos. Time spent getting to know PC(USA) mission co-workers is not wasted time.

You'll also need to clarify your expectations. Some mission co-workers have excellent connections for communication; some don't. Some can safely welcome visitors to their country of service; some can't.

Choose a few mission co-workers and please contact me, Bruce Whearty, 1-800-728-7228, ext. 5157, bruce.whearty@pcusa.org to find out if they are already securely funded. If they are, you can still pray for them and read their letters, but your donations should go to a mission co-worker who is under-funded.

Choose one or several mission co-workers and commit to their support through prayer, reading and writing letters, and financial help. This might involve the session, the PW, the mission committee, adult or youth Sunday school, or an informal group of interested members. If you need help with donations, I'd be glad to help.

How to Begin a Relationship with a PC(USA) Mission Co-worker

What happens next is entirely up to you, of course, but here are some suggestions.

1. Email the mission co-workers. (The email address will soon be added to their webpages, which you can reach through <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries.find-mission-worker> In the meantime, contact me for email addresses.) Let them know that you are going to be supporting them, and how their work fits with your local ministry. (They will be thrilled!) Ask them what concerns they would like you to lift in prayer, and promise to follow through. Ask if there are restrictions—in size or cost—on mailing things. For that matter, ask if things mailed to them are even likely to arrive.

(When Lora and I were in the South Pacific, if you sent us a package that had a declared cost of \$69.00 it would come sailing through the post office with no problems and arrive at our school. But if you sent something valued at \$70.00, it would kick over into a different line at customs and be held in the main post office in the capital city until we personally came to claim it, maybe six weeks later. Then we'd stand in long lines and have to pay duty fees, sometimes amounting to more than the declared value of the package itself, which by then was often rat-chewed and water-soaked.)

2. You should also ask about the co-worker's email connections. Some folks only get to an email connection every month or two, and others have excellent service. You need to know what you can expect. Can you send pictures or attachments? Can they Skype with you for a youth group meeting or for a Sunday service?

(A friend knew that Lora and I would be homesick for springtime in Montana, so one Friday she sent us an uncompressed flower photo that clogged up our connections. The whole country was without any network connections until Monday morning, when we had to take our computer to the capital city to help straighten out the mess!)

3. Add the co-workers to a prayer list or give their name to a prayer group, including the kids in your Sunday school. This is how we recruit the next generation of missionaries! Put their names in your bulletin as 'our missionary in -----,' and then send the missionaries a copy, along with a picture drawn by kids in your Sunday school.

(Lora and I always found notes like these touching, and they tended to arrive on the days when we needed them most. A bulletin with a hand-written note saying, "We prayed for you on Sunday." could keep us going for the whole next week.

4. Send your contact information to Bryce Smith, 1-800-728-7228, ext. 5373, bryce.smith@pcusa and ask to be added to the co-worker's mailing list. Make sure that your shut-ins are included. Commit to read your mission co-workers' letters and excerpt them in a column in your church newsletter so that the whole congregation starts to learn about what to pray for. Then send them your newsletters, too! You could produce a bulletin insert with a photo that people could take home and stick on their fridge as a prayer card.

(It was always a lift for Lora and me when someone wrote us and mentioned a story or a prayer concern that we had written about. Our letters were not just vanishing across the horizon; they actually touched someone!)

5. Get a world map, email Bryce Smith for a photo of your mission co-worker, and make a bulletin board display where everyone can see it. Celebrate your friendship!
6. Six weeks before Christmas, have everyone at the worship service on Sunday sign a Christmas card and send it. Then make plans for birthday cards and gifts. (Birthdates

are on the co-workers' webpages.) Holidays can be sad for missionaries (and their kids). They tend to be far from their families and their traditions. Lend them some joy!

7. Now that you are beginning to relate to this mission co-worker, look for news about the country and region. Educate yourselves about the issues of the area, both for individuals and for the church. Ask your mission co-worker for more information. With your new knowledge, pray more deeply.
8. Talk to neighboring churches and ask them to join you. That way, the mission co-worker's connection to your area increases. When it's time for your co-workers to be back in the states on interpretation assignments, they can make one trip and catch half a dozen churches over the course of a week (or a whole presbytery over a month!), which is much better stewardship than traveling just for one service at one church.
9. Contact Carol Somplatsky-Jarman, 1-800-728-7228, ext. 5826, carol.somplatsky-jarman@pcusa.org for information about interpretation assignment schedules, and how your presbytery can qualify for help in funding the mission co-worker's travel.
10. Brainstorm what other ideas might be meaningful for your congregation. Let me know what you come up with, so that I can add it to this paper, OK?

I'm sure you'll create a hundred more ways to connect, but this might be useful to help you get started. Please let me know if you need any other help, and also please let me know what your financial gifts will be to support the ministry of your co-worker. That information will help me in talking to other churches, since it will help me know how much more support is needed.

Thank you for your support of PC(USA) World Mission!

Love and peace,
Bruce Whearty

World Mission Church Support
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

office: 888-728-7228, ext. 5157
mobile: (502) 407-9636
email: bruce.whearty@pcusa.org