Member Care Overview:
Trends, Resources, and Future Directions
Kelly and Michèle O'Donnell (02/02 update)

Member care can be defined as the investment of resources by mission agencies, churches, and service organisations for the nurture and development of mission personnel. From our perspective, the goal is to develop inner strength, skills, and virtue, which will be key to helping personnel stay effective in their work. Member care is thus as much about developing inner resources within the person (e.g., perseverance, stress tolerance) as it is about providing external resources (e.g., team building, logistical support, skill training). It focuses on every member of the organisation, including children and home office staff, and seeks to implement an adequate "flow of care" from recruitment through retirement.

At the personal level, each individual must find a balance between the realities of suffering/sacrifice with the normal desires for personal growth/fulfilment. At the agency level, we must harmonise the organisational emphasis on "achievement/task" with the staff needs for "support/member care". For some the greatest stress results from a poor fit between one's background and preferences with the type of agency *ethos*--the "established way of doing things". For others it is from the more common or anticipated stressors, such as cross-cultural adjustment. Different cultures/settings emphasise different aspects of member care too, such as the role of mutual support in a community context or the need for self-support/fortitude for those in demanding/isolated locations.

Trends

1. Member care is becoming increasingly accepted and *mainstreamed* in missions. It is a Biblical responsibility and evidence of the love that Christ's followers have for each other. Some argue though that the pendulum has swung too far, and that member care can be overemphasised. Don Larson and Brent Lindquist for example, remind us that member care must also occur via the mutually supportive relationships that mission personnel build with nationals/locals, and not just with fellow Christian/agency colleagues, which can actually hinder involvement with people in the host culture.

2. Member care can be viewed as a *social movement* within missions, being influenced by and mirroring a similar movement in the secular work world (e.g., Human Resource Development, Employee Assistance Programs). It is also becoming a *disciplinary field* within missions, having it's own body of knowledge, ethical principles, research base, practitioners, and models.

3. A growing number of member care workers (e.g., pastors, personnel directors, counsellors) are providing their services *across organisational and cultural boundaries.* Some of the main areas include MK ministries, stress management, crisis care, personnel development, tropical medicine, interpersonal skills, and team life. Multicultural team life is also a growing reality, where finding practical ways to understand each other and get along is essential.

4. Member care is not just a "Western" phenomenon. It is also being increasingly discussed and developed within mission agencies and churches from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Although cultural perspectives and levels of development for member care vary within different regions, there is nonetheless a commitment to work and grow together in this important ministry. Some examples include the regional member task forces that have formed for Brazil, Germany, and Malaysia, as well as for Europe and Asia, and the establishment of Messiah College in Nigeria, an MK boarding school

for African MKs. Steady progress is being made in many organisations and regions, although there is, frankly, still much work that needs to be done.

Resources

1. Written Materials--There are a growing number of articles, research projects, and books in member care areas. Most are from the West, but more are now being written by Asians and Latin Americans (e.g., Polly Chan's edited work in Chinese, *"Nurturing Missionary Children"*). One classic work is Marjory Foyle's *Honourably Wounded* (1987). For a compilation of 50 important articles from 1974-1988, see *Helping Missionaries Grow* (1988), as well as the 25 articles in *Missionary Care* (1992). The October 1995 issue of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* explores several member care issues in frontier settings. Finally, we would commend the WEA book, *Too Valuable to Lose* (1997) for its excellent treatment of attrition/pastoral care, the 1998 book edited by Joyce Bowers, *Raising Resilient MKs,* and the book on international member care, *Doing Member Care Well* (2002)

2. Conferences--The grandfathers of them all have been the three International Conferences on MKs (held in Quito, Manila, and Nairobi in the 1980s). The gatherings of personnel directors/secretaries in the USA and in the UK are also note worthy as are the Mental Health and Missions Conference and the Pastors to Missions Conference, held annually in the USA. Three landmark events were the WEF Attrition/Pastoral Care Conference in England in 1996 and the two European Member Care Consultations held in France (1997, 1999). Similar gatherings for regions or nations within Asia, Africa, and Latin America have occurred or are being considered (e.g., Brazil, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia in 1999). Finally, various mission associations and societies also regularly have member care workshops during their conferences, where topics such as reentry and debriefing are discussed.

3. Service Organisations--*Too Valuable to Lose* (1997) included an international resource directory listing over 100 groups that provide member care services. That such a guide can now be assembled is indicative of the unprecedented number of service groups forming during the last 10 years (providing team building, screening, counselling, seminars, devotional messages, retreats, etc.). This guide, and many other resources, are on the web site of the WEA's Member Care Task Force (www.membercare.org). A related development and a potential resource for mission personnel is the emergence of national associations of Christian counsellors.

4. Training--There are many workshops and courses being taught on member care and related subjects. Member care courses have been taught in the USA, and also in Europe, Asia, and Australia. Singapore, Chiang Mai, Hong Kong etc. have been the site of several workshops and day consultations where member care-related cases and topics have been addressed. Member care training workshops are being offered throughout both OSCs and NSCs.

Future Directions

The current momentum in member care is most heartening. Yet there must be a more co-ordinated direction to what is happening. Consider these possibilities.

1. Form *interagency partnerships in different regions* of the world to further develop member care. Affiliate! This would include forming member care teams, doing research and joint projects, and setting up member care centres/facilities. Interagency member care task forces, for example, in partnership with different national associations of evangelicals, would be timely.

2. It would be good to see *individuals within sending agencies/churches network together* and work on mutual projects to improve member care for their people, involving mission administrators, pastors, and member care specialists. Do not leave member care up to chance!

3. Seek out *innovative and timely cross-cultural applications* of member care. Help mission personnel develop member care skills. Empower those on the front lines to minister to nationals--both Christians and non-Christians--in difficult or war-torn areas. An example is the reconciliation ministry being

done in Rwanda and Kosovo, as well as the training for pastors/teachers to work with traumatised children in Liberia. Let the member care blessings spill over onto the nations!

4. Continue to encourage the church to prioritise and direct its resources--including member care resources--towards those groups of people that have historically been the most neglected (e.g., *Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Chinese, Tribals.*

Departing in Peace or Pieces?
Research on Missionary Attrition
Kelly O'Donnell

Me a missionary casualty? No way! Think again. Whether one becomes a drop-out or push-out, burned-out or rusted-out, the chances for early departure from the field may be higher than you think. Let's look at the recent 14 nation attrition study sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship for some updates.

This study is found in the 1997 book "Too Valuable to Lose", edited by Dr. Bill Taylor, which has contributions from mission and member care leaders from all around the world. It is frankly, one of the most significant books on missions that has been published to date!

The 3Ps of Attrition
Basically, the WEF study found the overall annual attrition rate to be 5.1% for the 453 mission societies that were surveyed. When items such as normal retirement and possible transfer to another agency were ferreted out, the bottom line figure becomes 3.1%--attrition that is "undesirable" because it is premature, preventable, and likely permanent. Think of this as the *3Ps of the 3%*, to help remember the findings.

In real person terms, this may mean that some 12,000 plus missionaries are lost each year out of the global missionary pool estimated to be over 400,000 (both Catholic and Protestant (Barrett, 1998; *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*). Hey, that's more missionaries than are in our entire organisation! Such undesirable attrition also spills onto others, negatively impacting thousands of family members and friends in the home/host communities.

More Results
So why do missionaries leave the field? In the WEF study, the main reasons were, in order, normal retirement (9.4%), children's issues, change of job, health problems, lack of home support, problems with peers, personal concerns, disagreement with agency, lack of commitment, and lack of call (4.1%). Note that those surveyed in this study were mission administrators such as personnel directors, rather than the actual missionaries themselves.

Several important comparisons were also made between different groups of missionaries.
*Missionaries from the Newer Sending Countries (NSCs--e.g., Korea, Brazil, Nigeria) were a bit more at risk for "preventable" attrition than those from the older sending countries (OSCs--e.g., the UK, USA, Australia).
*Reasons for overall annual attrition between NSCs and OSCs were very different: for NSCs the top reasons were reported to be lack of home support (8.1%), lack of call (8.0%), inadequate commitment (7.3%), disagreement with agency (6.1%), problems with peers (5.7%), health problems (5.1%); for OSCs, the top reasons were normal retirement (13.2%), children (10.1%), change of job (8.9%), health problems (8.4%), problems with peers (6.0%), personal concerns (5.2%).
*In general the larger and older the mission society, the lower the preventable attrition rate.
*Those who worked in the same culture vs cross-culturally had almost the same preventable attrition rates.

*Workers in pioneer/church planting settings had lower preventable attrition rates than those in relief and development settings.

To continue, the most important factor in preventing attrition was reported to be the missionary having a clear call. This was then followed by having a supportive family, healthy spirituality, cultural adaptation, good relationships, pastoral care, and financial provision. Interestingly, a key component of pastoral care was the "regular communication" that occurred for field workers, which was rated even higher than pastoral visits or pre-field training (which are also very important).

Transience

Contact with so many cultures and people is so enriching. Yet transition, even planned transition, usually destabilizes. For some it creates a pervasive sense of loss while others experience a chronic low-grade sense of mourning. Others seem relatively unfazed, possibly because they have learned to form and sustain selective friendships, a practice encouraged in chapter six of Ecclesiasticus (JB).

We can also develop a "quick release button", to use the words of Dave Pollock of Interaction. We only get so close to colleagues, and when transition is imminent, we jettison the "relationship" to minimize the separation pain. Newcomers can likewise be jettisoned, since we are already quite involved with our current friendships and our usual workloads to make time for them. They in turn can inherit and pass on this technique, for better or worse!

Some Suggestions

I appreciate the recent "codes of best practice" which have developed standards for the management and care of overseas workers (e.g., by the People in Aid, the UK Evangelical Missions Association). These documents offer agreed-upon criteria for evaluating our member care approaches, and we would do well to thoroughly review them. Dave Pollock's "Flow of Care" chart, outlining member care needs from recruitment through retirement, is also helpful (*Interact*, October, 1997).

But how do we put these items into practice? And how do we reduce our attrition rates? There's no way around it: We in missions must commit ourselves to more comprehensive, culturally-sensitive approaches to sustain and nurture our personnel over the long-haul. Who will do all this? Caring leaders (church and mission) who make time for their people. People like personnel development specialists, pastors, strategy coaches, and cross-cultural trainers, who are available to support and further equip our workers. And finally colleagues and friends--you and me--whose mutual encouragement provide the backbone for effective member care programs.

Let's also use the findings from the WEF study to help our people to:
*Clarify and grow in their sense of call
*Prepare realistically through good pre-field selection and training approaches
*Cultivate their walks with the Lord
*Stay connected with supportive friends and family
*Care for their children's educational and developmental needs
*Improve interpersonal, conflict resolution, and ministry-related skills
*Raise finances for long-term involvement
*Maintain good communication with leaders and peers
*Understand various service opportunities and career development possibilities
*Connect with leaders/mentors who can help them negotiate the missions world
*Receive helpful member care resources throughout the course of their missionary lives
*Go through exit interviews with follow-up for greater closure on their missions experience.

Final Thoughts

Attrition, historically, has been part of the cost the Church has paid for penetrating the Enemy's darkness. People in war are vulnerable, and inevitably get hurt. Our weaknessess as people and as sending agencies also make us vulnerable. So let's put attrition in perspective. Whether it be considered preventable or unpreventable, desirable or undesirable, *missionary* attrition happens as we work together to prevent the *eternal* attrition which hovers over the unreached peoples of the earth.

Too bad there is no attrition vaccination. However, discussing the above issues and suggestions with others will definitely help. Why not review the WEF study and a few chapters of the book *Too Valuable to Lose* with your colleagues? Find practical ways to apply the material. This will be one of your greatest aids for preventing undesirable attrition!

Based on an article in the "International YWAMer", October, 1998