

Monthly Missiological Reflection #11

"Maintaining Missionary Health"

Effectively caring for missionaries living many miles away in a different culture necessitates that missions leaders have some well-defined ways of measuring the spiritual and emotional well-being of their missionaries. The following two instruments assist missions leaders to ascertain their missionaries' health.

The first instrument is a questionnaire adapted from the Association of Church Missions Committees (Pollard, 1988, 69-70). I suggest that missionaries be asked to complete the questionnaire at a certain time each year to enable missions leaders to track their needs.

Our Missionaries' Health Report

I. Personal Life

- A. How is your devotional life?
- B. Are there any particular themes God is teaching you or emphasizing in your life?
- C. How do you feel about life in general? (up or down, anxious or peaceful, etc.)
- D. What has served to encourage you?

II. Family Life

- A. How has your time been with your spouse? Are you setting aside quality time to spend together?
- B. How has your time been with your children? Are you spending quality time with them?
- C. In what specific ways are you encouraged about your family relationships?
- D. If you are single, are you spending quality time with mutual friends? If you are living with someone else? How is that relationship?

III. Ministry

- A. What are you most encouraged about in your ministry?
- B. What goals have you been able to accomplish?
- C. Towards what new goals are you striving?
- D. What are you most frustrated about in your ministry?
- E. How is your ministry different from six months ago?
- F. How is your relationship with missionary co-workers?

IV. Prayer Requests

How can we be praying for you and your ministry?

V. Help Requests

How can we, as your supporting, overseeing church, help you?

The second suggested instrument was developed by missionary psychologists Kelly and Michele O'Donnell. Their models enables both missionaries and missions leaders supporting them to understand the stresses that they have, acknowledge their success in coping with the stress, and develop new coping strategies to handle the stress (O'Donnell and O'Donnell 1995, 185-188). They use the acronym **CCHHOOPPSS** (as in *lamb chops*) to help missionaries understand and cope with ten general categories of missionary stress. They picture Satan is like a wolf, who loves lamb chops, and will use every stress to disrupt the work of missionaries.

This is an exceptionally valuable resource in measuring missionary stress when they are at home on furlough. After taking the inventory a qualified missions counselor, who is able to effectively enter into the missionaries' dilemmas and equip them to cope with the stresses of working as God's emissary in another culture, should personally counsel them. It is very important that a qualified counselor works with the missionaries rather than a missions leader without counseling experience. Sometimes an inexperienced, judgmental missions leader can do more harm than good.

O'Donnells' CCHHOOPPSS Model of Evaluating Missionary Stress

Please read through the ten categories of the following inventory. Put stressors that apply to you in a column labeled **struggles**. In a second column, called **successes**, list helpful ways that they have dealt with stress during the past several months. In a third column under **strategies** write ideas for better managing stress in the future.

Cultural: I am having a hard time coping with language learning and culture shock. I am confused and stressed since I have reentered my own culture.

Crisis: I feel trauma from unexpected events within my recipient culture, such as natural disaster, war, accidents, and political instability.

Historical: I perceive problems with unresolved areas of personal struggle, including personal weaknesses and family of origin issues.

Human: I feel tension with family members, colleagues, national church leaders in areas such as raising children, couple conflict, struggles with team members, and social opposition.

Occupational: I perceive job-specific challenges and pressures due to work load, travel schedule, exposure to peoples' problems, job fulfillment, adequacy of training, and government "red tape".

Organizational: I feel incongruence between my background and the ethos of our missions organization including differences of training, understanding of missions, policies of work, and expectations.

Physical: I struggle with overall health and the factors that affect it such as nutrition, climate, illness, aging, and environment.

Psychological: I have a hard time coping with overall emotional stability including items such as loneliness, frustration, depression, unwanted habits, and developmental or state of life issues.

Support: I feel tension because of inadequate resources to sustain my work because of lack of overall support, cost of housing, lack of clerical and technical help, cost of children's education, and limited contact with supporters.

Spiritual: I struggle with my relationship with the Lord because of subtle temptations, limited devotional life, and lack of contact with other believers.

Too frequently missionaries experience unnecessary psychological trauma because they receive inadequate support. They sometimes remain faithful to god, family, and ministry despite inadequate spiritual nurturing and equipping to cope with stress but are less effective in ministry and life than they would otherwise be. At other times they fall away from God because of temptation, stress, and discouragement (Note the monthly reflection on [Why Missionaries Fall](#)). Using these two instruments will enable missions leaders to track the emotional and spiritual health of their missionaries and to specifically encourage them in their ministries.

Sources Cited

Pollard, Mike. 1988. *Cultivating a Missions-Active Church*. Peachtree, GA: Association of Church Missions Committees.

O'Donnell, Kelly and Michele Lewis O'Donnell. 1995. Foxes, Giants, and Wolves. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* Vol. 12, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec.):185-188.