

## How do I get my church to support me?

This question presupposes it might be a struggle. Which it often is, sadly. Yes, there are some churches who have a good set up, with top-level commitment to overseas missions, a well-organised and properly-funded team, who will get alongside you from the word go and guide you every step of the way. But for most of us, it can be a hard slog to get church support. Why do you need it? Well, most mission organisations won't take you without active and visible support from your church leadership, and even if they do, you still need to have the support of a team behind you. Without that, serving God abroad can feel very much like bungee jumping without being sure the bungee's been properly secured. We know; we've tried both.

First of all: what is a church? For those of us who are part of an established denominational church, there's a pretty straightforward answer, but these days there are increasing numbers of people who are part of loose Christian networks, deconstructed churches, internet church or maybe even no formal church at all. What implications does that have for church support? Well, it doesn't rule you out straight away, though you may have to look hard for a mission organisation that will accept you, and you may have to work hard at defending your choice of church style. Ultimately you should be looking for a group of Christians who are committed to you and world mission, who believe in and endorse your calling, and are able and willing to support you pastorally, financially, practically, and in prayer. That may include a voyage of discovery for them as much as for you, but as long as you're committed to each other, it should work out.

The first thing you need to do is talk to your church leadership at an early stage. Don't present them with a fait accompli and expect them to back it. Tim tried this, and the result wasn't pretty. Would you willingly support something you have had no part in planning? So why should they? Talk to your leadership and tell them what you're thinking, ask for their advice and input. They may have a lot of experience which will help you, or they may be new at the game. In that case, gently point them in the direction of advice, by showing them our web pages for churches, or providing books for them (see Reading).

As your plans take shape, continue to discuss them with the church leaders. Ask them to pray for you. Begin to talk to the leadership and individual friends about funding. Ask for some platform time so you can tell the wider church what your plans are, and ask them to pray for you. Look for people in the church who have served abroad, and ask them to mentor you. If your church has smallgroups, visit each one in turn and brief them. Ask them to pray for you. Make sure everyone in the church knows who you are and what you're going to be doing. Be at ALL the meetings. There is no substitute for being linked into the church community. People don't often support a stranger.

As the time for your departure approaches, appoint a key individual in the church as your 'ambassador' and make sure they're briefed to stir up support for you. Plan a meeting where you can invite people to hear what you're going to be doing, and show them photos or give them some food from the country if you've been there before. Use this opportunity to sign people up to receive your prayer letters or to become part of your prayer group. Appoint a prayer group leader and have

a few prayer meetings before you go, so your prayer partners get used to praying for you while you're still there. Make sure you get a commissioning service at church.

The most important element in making sure your church is supporting you is involvement. The church wants to see that you're involved with it, not merely milking it, and the church wants to be involved in your ministry. This might mean that you need to think hard about which church you're part of, and may need to move to one that is better able to support you. In turn, that will mean you need to invest a couple of years of building relationships and working in the church. Always remember that the church is your partner in your ministry, and needs to be involved, consulted, communicated with, and listened to.