

Do I really need to join a mission organisation?

Many people today are put off going abroad with an established sending organisation. Faced with a apparently complex and bureaucratic application process, a lengthy lead time, high financial costs and compromises needing to be made to fit into an organisation's style and theology, they seriously consider going it alone. After all, it's not hard to book a flight, most people speak English these days, and it can't be that hard to get a visa. So why bother doing it by the book?

There are many reasons why a mission organisation is still worth considering despite the drawbacks, and here are some of them:

Accountability. Who is actually going to keep an eye on you, checking what you're doing, making sure your relationships are healthy and your doctrine is sound? Although you may in theory be accountable to your church, their leadership are not on the spot, and may not have an understanding of missions or the local culture. Most mission organisations will have in-country leadership, with great experience and understanding of how to do missions in that country. They will be able to support, direct and if necessary correct you.

Care. What happens to the independent missionary if something goes wrong? Who is there to support and counsel? Who visits you in hospital, or negotiates with the authorities to get you out of jail? How are you going to find fellowship and teaching if you're on your own? Most mission organisations have in-field arrangements for looking after their people well.

Credibility. A mission organisation already has credibility with the government, which is useful for getting you a work permit, and lots of links with local churches which are automatically extended to its new missions partners. Independents can often spend years trying to build up this level of credibility because they are simply not trusted by local believers.

Finance. It may seem that a mission organisation expects you to raise a lot of money in order to go with them, and a lot of it you won't see as it's creamed off to meet their overheads. But don't forget you may benefit from those overheads. Much of the infrastructure is there for the benefit of the members, liked trained in-field medical teams, comfortable holiday homes, and financial stability when your own support goes through a temporary drought. You may benefit from pensions contributions or expense allowances while you're back on home assignment.

Training. From detailed pre-departure training, through field orientation, language acquisition, cultural acclimatisation, ongoing personal development to re-entry preparation and debriefing, the mission organisation will know exactly what training you need to help you conduct your ministry effectively. How will you get all this support if you're on your own?

So Syzygy suggests that you don't seriously consider going it alone until you've spoken with several mission organisations first. If one or more of them turns you down, don't assume that's it, and you have to go independently. Think seriously about why they turned you down. Is there an opportunity for character growth or skills development here? Perhaps they've given you guidance by setting out some objectives for you to achieve before they would accept you. It's likely that their

experience shows them that you would be more effective as a missions partner if you followed their advice.

It may be that they're right to reject you – perhaps you're really not cut out for life as a missions partner. That doesn't mean that you can't continue to be involved in world missions – by sending others, financing, praying, mentoring, administrating – there are all sorts of ways in which people are needed to be involved.

Most people can think of an independent missionary who has survived and flourished. Gladys Aylward and Jackie Pullinger have become legends through doing their own things. But history forgets the hundreds that fall by the wayside. Syzygy recommends that everyone going abroad seriously considers going with a reputable mission organisation. There may not be one doing what you feel called to do, or working where you feel called to go, and you might end up going it alone, but unless you feel very strongly called to do this, we think you're likely to be much more effective working with an established organisation.