

## Advocacy Teams

Advocacy Teams are the most tangible expression of *our church's* commitment to support our missionaries who are serving in cross-cultural environments. The team is centered around one team leader and can be made up of 4-8 individuals who provide on-going care and support. They serve as a primary link between the church as a whole and the missionary.

Simply put, an advocate team is a group of people who deeply love and care for their missionary. They communicate, pray for and stay connected to their missionary on a regular basis. Because of these strong personal relationships, the missionary can be open and honest, allowing his or her team to see needs and share successes and defeats.

### What Is The Vision For Advocacy Teams?

There are two major roles of an Advocacy Team: care and representation. The success of an advocate team depends on its ability to accomplish these two goals from the time that the missionary prepares to leave for the field until his or her return.

#### *Care*

Many missionaries live in physically challenging environments. Some are raising children far from extended family. Others struggle with cultural adjustments and language barriers. Most significantly, all serve on the front lines of spiritual warfare. For survival and spiritual health, missionaries need the assurance that they are not alone, that there are others in the body of Christ who love them and are committed to their welfare and also to the success of their work. Missionaries need empathetic listeners—compassionate, caring friends who are not in a supervisory role. The Advocacy Team can consistently provide that kind of spiritual and emotional care. Caring also involves identifying specific needs which the team can meet or organize others in our church to meet.

#### *Representation*

The Advocacy Team also champions the missionary and his or her work to our church body and advocates for ongoing participation in that missionaries' ministry even when he or she is far away. Thanks to the efforts of the Advocate Team, our church feels an ongoing sense of connection to our workers.

### What Does An Advocacy Team Look Like?

We have intentionally kept the structure of our Advocacy Teams simple. The foundation of each Advocacy Team is the team leader. He/She is the one who has the main connection with the missionary and leads the team in all aspects. The team leader either already knows the missionary deeply or commits to build a deep relationship. The rest of the team is built under the leadership of this committed person.

Each Advocacy Team will look different. Some will have a team leader with 6-8 additional people on the team while others will have a leader with just one or two additional people on the team. Both types of teams can serve as great care networks for our missionaries.

Depending on the team members' season of life, people may need to step out of their Advocacy Team. We ask however that team leaders commit to the missionaries' full term (2-4 years) and/or be willing to replace themselves in this role if needed.

### **What Does An Advocate Team Do?**

#### *Meet Monthly*

Teams can meet at anytime and anywhere, we just ask that each team meet once a month to fulfill their role as advocates.

#### *Pray*

The main role of an Advocacy Team is to pray monthly as a team and on an individual basis. We also ask that you hold your missionary accountable to update their prayer requests monthly on Google docs.

#### *Stay Connected*

Ask any missionary and they will tell you that they rarely stay connected with their friends and church family back home. Part of providing care to missionaries is the commitment to stay connected. Your missionary should hear from you at least once a month. This can happen through emails, Skype, handwritten letters or any number of creative ways. Make sure this is part of your team meeting.

#### *Send Care Packages*

Nothing says I love you to a missionary quite like a box full of ranch dressing mix, chocolate and a few good books! Advocacy Teams will send at least two care packages a year to their missionary. *Our Church* will pay for two of these packages with the hopes of your team sending a few more from your own personal funds if possible. *Our Church* will reimburse you up to \$150 per care package (\$100 for contents and \$50 for shipping).

#### *Help with Departure and Arrival*

Some of the hardest times for your missionary will be preparing to leave for the field and returning home for a stateside visit. There are a thousand things that need to be done and we ask that your team jump in and help as much as possible.

### **How Do We Get Started?**

Here are three things to do to get your Advocacy Team started:

### *Email the Team*

Once the team leader is in place, he/she can email others on the team or start recruiting for the team. Get everyone on an email list and start communicating with one another.

### *Email your Missionary*

The team leader needs to email the missionary and let them know their Advocacy Team is forming. Ask for prayer requests and invite the missionary to the first meeting via Skype.

### *Meet as a Team*

Set a date for your first meeting. Pick a home to meet in and share a meal with one another. During this meeting make sure you get to know each other, pray for the missionary and if possible talk to your missionary on Skype. Also make sure you set up a regular time and place to meet.

## **Helpful Hints for Advocacy Teams**

What are some specific things Advocacy Teams can do to care for their missionaries well?

### **Educate:**

- Spend time with them and their families prior to their departure. Get to know the missionaries and their kids on a personal level.
- Ask specific questions about their lives in the host country: What kind of work are they doing? What does a typical day look like? What are their living arrangements? What is transportation like? What is it like to shop for food, or cook there? What is the climate and how does it affect them? How are they treated by the locals? How are their children treated by the locals? Do they work on a team? If so, how are the relationships within the team?
- Ask specific questions about the culture/environment of the host country: What is the host culture's attitude toward time: slow or fast-paced? Do locals tend to be more task-oriented or people-oriented? Are the locals generally open to interacting with foreigners? What is their attitude toward Americans? How welcoming are the national and local governments to foreigners like themselves? What is the level of risk in operating in the host country? If a high level of risk is involved, what kinds of precautions do they take to do their work? What is/are the prevailing beliefs in the area? What is the level of oppression, including outright demonic activity in the area? How does this affect them and their family? How healthy is the local body? What kind of interaction do they have with the local body?

## Advocacy Teams

- Ask specific questions about their projects (if possible, in light of security precautions): What are their objectives? How are they pursuing those objectives? What obstacles have they run into? What are some encouraging aspects of the work going on there? What are some discouraging aspects of the work?
- Read up on current events in their country and/or region, and ask how these events affect their lives and/or ministry.
- If the means are available, visit them on the field!

### **Pray:**

- Beginning six months before their departure, meet with the missionaries once a month for prayer.
- After their departure, communicate regularly to develop a working prayer list. Use the list to pray individually for them and once a month, gather as a group to pray for them together.
- Pray for your missionary in your community group, with your family and in your own prayer time.

### **Communicate:**

- Write an email, connect on Facebook, make a Skype call, or connect in some other way with at least once a month.
- Send birthday cards, anniversary cards or Christmas cards.
- Ask if they have any practical needs that the Advocacy Team and/or the church body could help with.
- Ask questions about their physical, emotional and spiritual health.
- Inform them of recent happenings with the church and happenings in your own life.
- Understand that life on the field is just as full (if not more so) than life in the U.S., and that you may not immediately hear back from them. If they don't get back with you within a week or so, try again. If they continue to be non-responsive, contact the mission leadership within the church.

### **Represent:**

- The team leader should relate pertinent information on the missionary's life and service (including prayer requests, updates, needs, concerns, etc.) to the mission leadership on a regular basis.

### **Provide:**

- Ask if they need assistance in areas of personal business, such as preparing taxes or registering for absentee ballots during elections.
- If they will be coming home on furlough, ask them whether or not they need assistance finding housing or a vehicle.
- Help clean the missionaries' residence before they return.
- Coordinate meals and/or childcare for them the first week of their arrival.

**Departure and Arrival:**

- While they are in pre-field training, meet together once a month for prayer and encouragement.
- As the departure date draws near, assist in packing, moving, shopping, and/or childcare (while the parents take care of the above).
- If possible, send them off at the airport when they depart.
- Read a book on re-entry to prepare for their homecoming. (Suggestion: *The Re-entry Team* by Neal Pirolo)
- If needed, assist in securing housing and a vehicle before they return.
- If possible, meet them at the airport when they return.
- When they come home, schedule time with them to ask questions, see pictures and talk about life in their host country.
- After they return, pray with them about their host country, including their friends/ contacts in the host country.