

# How to Choose a Mission Agency

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Choosing a mission agency is a crucial decision that will affect both the joy and the effectiveness of your ministry for a long time. Prayer and communication can help you make the right choice. There are many good Mission Agencies, but not every one may be right for you. Finding the agency that best fits you and your ministry takes some work, but it's well worth it.

## Your Church

Your sending church is the place to begin. Agencies exist to help the churches fulfill God's mandate for worldwide missions. If you haven't already done so, talk with your pastor or missions pastor and involve him in the decision-making process. See if he or someone else in the church leadership who has a heart for missions is willing and able to pray, advise, and talk with you through the process. Then evaluate what you already know about yourself and the ministry God is calling you to, and begin your research into Mission Agencies.

## Your Call

Before you begin to gather information on Mission Agencies, think about what God is calling you to do and how your personality and spiritual gifts fit with His plan. God has prepared and is preparing you for a specific ministry that will glorify Him, and he is preparing that ministry for you. A clear vision of your call and of what the future can hold if you obey it will guide you in more decisions than the choice of an agency. Never compromise your call.

## Your Agency

Here is where the research begins. How do you really get to know an agency and what questions should you ask? Some information can be gleaned from their website and printed brochures, but most questions will need to be asked personally. This is a good thing because it gives you the opportunity, not only to get the information, but to see the heart of the agency as well as its face. After you have narrowed the field by eliminating incompatible agencies, establish a relationship by phone or email with someone in the leadership of agencies and get a feel for the agency as you collect information. See if you can talk with one or more missionaries to get their perspective, as well. What are some of the things you should find out about a Mission Agency you are considering?

*Doctrine*

Shared doctrine is the best platform for an effective ministry partnership. Be sure that you understand and are comfortable with the doctrinal positions of the agency. Ask questions about anything that isn't clear. Sometimes different people use a term in different ways and a discussion will clarify the position and reveal whether you believe the same or not. Sometimes what is omitted is as important as what is included. Are there key areas that are not addressed in the doctrinal statement? Why? Does the Agency hold its doctrinal position consistently on the field as well as in the U.S.? Some things may be held as positions of the Agency, though they are not dealt with in the doctrinal statement. What does the agency say about:

- Versions of Scripture
- Ecumenism
- Charismatic /Sign Gifts
- Divorce/Remarriage
- The Role of Women
- Child Safety and Protection
- Other issues important to you?

### *Values*

What the Agency lists as its core values gives a clue to its heart. The history, trends, and changes in an Agency also help to reveal its priorities. Do they have a specific focus (ministry/location) that doesn't fit with your call? What part does the Local Church play? How do they view the national church? Do they promote or seek to minimize paternalism and dependence. What is their attitude toward the individual missionary and toward the ministry goals (see member care)?

### *Personality*

Every Mission Agency has its own personality. Just as your spouse's personality is important, so you need to get to know the personality of your Agency and be sure you are compatible. Being "married" to a good Mission Agency with an incompatible personality can be extremely frustrating!

- Do they tend to be corporate or team oriented?
- Are they a guardian of the status quo or a facilitator of ministry?
- Is their oversight authoritarian, coaching, laissez-faire, or a mix?
- How do they respond to a missionary with a problem in his life or ministry?

## *Goals*

As you look at your call and ministry vision, certain goals arise.

- What are your ministry goals? Are they compatible with the goals of the Agency?
- What is the Agency's vision for the future? How does that impact your relationship?
- What is the scope of the Agency's ministry? Can they partner with your ministry in the location to which God is sending you? What if God should lead you to a change of ministry or location in the future? Does the Agency have the flexibility to allow for that? What are your expectations of the Agency?
- What does the Agency expect of you?

## *Policies*

Investigating all the details of an Agency's policies may be daunting and not something you would do until you are nearly certain that it's the Agency God has for you. But here are some key areas you should ask about:

- Process for joining and any educational or other requirements they have.
- Do they encourage and allow for continuing education
- How highly do they value language acquisition and acculturation? How do they help you adjust?
- What are their furlough policies? How long? How often? What is expected of you on furlough?
- What is their accountability structure?
  - Does it seem to be more geared to "checking up on you" or "helping you succeed?"
  - Reports? (Does anyone read them?)
  - Field visits from the Home office?
  - Regular affirmation of the doctrinal statement?
  - Ministry progress review at furlough?
- Family Life

- Responsibilities of a spouse
  - Education of children
- Member Care
  - Does their perspective on member care seem more positive (facilitating) or negative (“putting out fires”)
  - Training and Orientation
  - Debriefing
  - Crisis Management
  - What happens if a missionary does have a serious problem (physical, spiritual, marital, relational, emotional)
  - Is there a mandatory retirement age? What happens when a missionary retires?
- Finances
  - How much is used to support home office and field administration?
  - What is the policy on educational debt?
  - How is the support level set?
  - Is full support required before you can go to the field?
  - What provisions are made for retirement?