

The Spiritual Journey of Missionaries -

Workshop led by Linda Gunderson: Linda Gunderson served as a missionary and church planter with her husband in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for 20 years. Both of their children were born and raised in Brazil. Since 2010 she has served on the member care team for ReachGlobal in various capacities. Linda is a trained spiritual director and her great joy is to walk alongside missionaries as they journey with Jesus.

Workshop description: Each of us has a unique journey with God. Missionaries have distinct challenges in their spiritual journey as well as numerous benefits. In this workshop we will take a closer look at what it's like for missionaries to navigate their spiritual life while living overseas. We will also talk about some practical ways that the local church and member care workers can support and come alongside them.

There is no exact roadmap. So today we are talking in generalities, big ideas, but my hope is to get to a place where there are also practical suggestions and help, both in the way we think and what we do to care for global workers. I recognize that there is a wide range of people here today as well: church mission's teams and member care folks. My hope is to increase your awareness as well as have you leave with some practical ideas to help you as you care for missionaries.

Linda's story of life as a missionary:

Discussion around the potential benefits of being a missionary to their spiritual life.

1. People are praying for you and that matters!
2. They may find helpful mentors along the way or encouraging support from their member care team.
3. Teammates in their field of service may be a healthy community
4. It's your job to pay attention to God and ministry
5. Front row seat to miracles and seeing God work

There are many benefits: a missionary may encounter great support around them on the field and at home. They may feel encouraged and challenged and God might show up in miraculous ways! They may thrive on the field and feel God with them.

Now let's switch gears and talk for a while about some of the challenges missionaries may feel in their spiritual life. I'm guessing if you paid attention to my story you will have some good ideas.

Challenges Missionaries feel in their spiritual life:

1. The impact of the spiritual environment where they are serving – each mission field has its unique challenges (intense spiritual warfare, no church at all, environment of materialism and secularism) and that environment will affect missionaries.
2. Identity struggle as a global worker – “Who am I? I used to know, but I’m not sure anymore.” Can result in hiddenness and shame.
3. When ministry is your job – substituting ministry preparation and busyness with relational and personal time with God
4. Impact of increased stress and trauma – each global worker will react differently to stress and trauma. (Evacuation, violence, health issues, effects of surveillance, secondary trauma from suffering and so much more) For some they will draw near to God, others will feel abandoned by him.
5. Distorted images of God – The mission field can uncover unhealthy views of God. When God doesn’t answer prayers, they may feel rejected etc. Importance of a robust theology of suffering.
6. The impact of understanding stages of faith – There is a general trajectory of spiritual stages and understanding that can be helpful.
7. Understanding the unique way each of us connects to God – For global workers the way they connect with God may be affected when they move overseas.

What is helpful and how can mission teams and member care workers come alongside missionaries in their spiritual journeys?

Discussion in groups: (15 minutes with 5 minutes to share)

1. Be sensitive and aware but not judgmental. Listen. Ask. Listen some more.
2. Pray for them. Prayer moves the heart of God, and now you know better how to pray
3. They need to deeply know and experience God’s love for them – Spiritual formation practices can be very helpful
4. Safe places to process their experiences and how it is affecting their relationship with God. (Spiritual directors, safe member care folks, close mature friends)

5. Tangible physical support can be helpful too! (Housing, cars, expenses paid for, babysitting, books, subscriptions)
6. Structures and tools that help support their personal relationships with God. (Retreats & conferences, getaways etc. Ask what would bless them)
7. Understanding the balance between input/output and doing/being or abiding. Knowing the signs of imbalance and what to do when you see them.

Resources:

Spiritual Directors:

Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association – for a list of spiritual directors. Read their bios to find one with experience overseas. <https://www.graftedlife.org/spiritual-direction/esda>

Spiritual Directors here in the Twin Cities - <https://www.restorationmn.org/>

Sustainable Faith - <https://sustainablefaith.com/>

Barnabas, Velvet Ashes, and Fall Creek Abbey offer spiritual directors as well (see below)

Retreats/Member Care support:

Barnabas Member Care Organization for mission orgs that have no member care. Excellent resources, retreats, debriefs <https://www.barnabas.org/member-care>

Retreat center in Indiana and a list of spiritual directors - <https://www.fallcreekabbey.org/>

Velvet Ashes - <https://velvetashes.com/> also has a list of trained spiritual directors

Spiritual Retreats by Joan Kelley in Chicago area- online or in person
<https://www.mylifeissacred.com/>

Place to stay for retreat in Indiana <https://www.shuneministries.org/>

Counseling for Missionaries:

Alongside Counseling <https://www.alongsidecares.net/>

Link Care- <https://linkcare.org/>

Careport Counseling Center. www.careportcounseling.org

Godspeed Resources Connection - <https://www.godspeedresources.org/#grc>

Resources in Spiritual Formation

Bridgetown Church – great trusted resources <https://bridgetown.church/teaching/>

Podcasts from Practicing the Way by John Mark Comer on Spiritual Formation practices

Books: (May be found cheaper in places other than Amazon)

Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy by Donald R Hands and Wayne February
<https://a.co/d/4Ako08x>

Sacred Companions by David Benner <https://a.co/d/7DqYsM1>

Tender Care by the Seabrook Seven (Barnabas International ministers)
<https://a.co/d/1o1Dacf>

Soul Care by Rob Reimer <https://a.co/d/57ZWNiy>

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer <https://a.co/d/4w3cD7u>