

What Is an Advocate?

An advocate is a person who takes the responsibility to coordinate a church's support of a missionary, and to serve as their advocate to the people at home. This person is the primary link between missionaries and the rest of the church body. Because of the strong personal relationships developed between missionaries and their advocates, missionaries can be open and honest, sharing their personal concerns as well as blessings, ministry needs, and opportunities for greater partnership.

Why Is an Advocate Important?

All missionaries serve on behalf of local churches. They do not go to the field "alone." Third John 6-7 admonishes: "You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out,..." An advocate is the most tangible expression of a church's or individual's commitment to support, in a worthy manner, those we send out and to "go with them" in every way possible.

What Is the Advocate Responsible to Do?

There are two major aspects of an advocate's work: **care** and **representation**.

- ✓ **Care:** Many cross-cultural workers live in physically challenging environments. Some are raising children far from extended family. Others struggle with cultural adjustments and language barriers. Most significantly, they serve on the frontlines of spiritual warfare. Daily they are challenging Satan's domain.

For survival and spiritual health, all missionaries need the assurance that they are not alone, that their sending body loves them and is committed to both their personal welfare and the success of their work. Missionaries need empathetic listeners—compassionate, caring friends who are not in a supervisory role. The advocate can consistently provide that kind of spiritual/emotional support. Caring also involves identifying practical needs which partners at home can meet.

- ✓ **Representation:** The advocate also champions the missionaries and their work to individuals and the local church body and advocates for ongoing participation in those workers' ministry even when they are far away. Thanks to the efforts of the advocate, our partners feel an ongoing sense of connection that keeps them involved in the life and ministry of the workers who may be on the other side of the globe.

What Are the Advocate's Tasks?

(An Advocate can choose to do some or all of these.)

1. **Pray.** Individual members pray consistently—if possible on a daily basis—for the workers and encourage prayer from others.
2. **Promote.** This may consist of calling the workers for an update and prayer, then discussing topics such as a previously circulated article on missionary stress, planning for a booth featuring the missionaries at an upcoming missions weekend, or brainstorming items for a care package to be sent to the family's college-age MK during finals week.
3. **Provide a safe place.** The advocate establishes an atmosphere in which the workers feel comfortable enough to be honest and vulnerable concerning their situation and needs. High standards of confidentiality are required. If the workers share a personal concern, an advocate must be faithful in maintaining confidentiality (except in situations where our church policy requires that for moral or safety reasons the information must be shared with the proper authority). The advocate is not expected to act as a

professional counselor; if in-depth spiritual or psychological help is needed, the workers should be referred to a pastor or professional counselor.

4. **Maintain communication.** The advocate stays in regular communication with the missionaries both on the field and on home assignment for the purpose of (a) keeping up to date on prayer requests and answers, (b) learning of practical needs their partners might be able to help meet, (c) monitoring the workers' physical, mental, and spiritual health, and (d) keeping the workers up to date about what is going on in the local church.
5. **Provide help and advocacy in building the missionaries' support team.** New appointees need assistance with the challenge of building their support team. The advocate can provide advice, aid in the development of presentations for various ages and settings, offer childcare, set up computer databases, etc. (Whatever the needs may be.) They serve as moral support and prayer partners, and when appropriate, they introduce the appointees and share excitement about their future ministry with the local church. The advocate should also introduce and recommend the workers to potential supporters.
6. **Coordinate on-field service.** As the advocate team becomes aware of a need that our partners could meet, they identify an individual or group within a church body who could provide the solution and make sure that the plan is carried through to completion. The team can recruit one or more small groups or Sunday school classes of various ages to "adopt" the missionaries for a period of time. Then the advocate team serves as a resource to this class to sustain a flow of information and involvement.

They can also make sure that cards and care packages are sent regularly to the workers and their children. Some advocate also help plan short-term trips to serve alongside their missionaries.

7. **Represent your missionaries to the congregation.** The advocate team works with the missions team to keep the workers' ministry and needs before the whole congregation and smaller groups within the church. This may include "moment for missions" updates in worship services, Sunday school and small group presentations, PowerPoint announcements, bulletin and church newsletter blurbs, etc.
8. **Assist with home-assignment plans.** The advocate helps their missionaries with the practical logistics of home assignment. This could include finding housing and a dependable vehicle, enrolling children in school, scheduling medical appointments, locating a relaxing vacation spot, and many other tasks related to successfully transitioning to our area.

Other services may be appreciated during the missionaries' time at home: childcare, training in how to use a new computer program, funds to send children to camp, tickets to a sporting event or concert, etc. The advocate can fill these needs or recruit others to serve in myriad ways.

9. **Help with reconnecting.** The advocate assists their missionaries to integrate back into the life and care of the church when in our area. This could include holding various events where the missionaries can report and be reintroduced to the congregation, assisting children to be welcomed back into age-appropriate activities and friendships, helping with preparation of media presentations, etc.