Practical Considerations

in Preparing for Overseas Missions
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This booklet was written by Paul and Janice Meiburger, Great Commission Europe missionaries in Italy. It was written with a lot of help from others within Great Commission Europe and the Great Commission church movement. The motivation for this booklet is to simply share our experiences (both good and difficult) and also to encourage and provide practical help for others considering overseas ministry. Our common passion is to glorify Jesus Christ and in a united way fulfill His Great Commission.

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Practical Considerations in Preparing for Overseas Missions

"For someone whose heart God has stirred to consider moving overseas for the sake of the gospel, this booklet is invaluable. Whether you are relatively young in your faith, or a seasoned reproducer, you will be challenged to be properly motivated, prepared and equipped. And whatever you do, don't just read over the content and skip over the practical assignments. Come join us in this great adventure of faith!"


This booklet captures a lot of really good issues for someone considering overseas ministry and it will give you a lot to think and pray about.

Mark Darling, Pastor and church planter with significant involvement in The Rock Berlin, Germany and Great Commission Latin America.
Practical Considerations in Preparing for Overseas Missions

David and Svea Flood had no idea what was in store for them as they moved from Sweden to the heart of Africa with their 2-year-old child in 1921. Armed with faith, a sense of adventure and another couple to labor with, they ventured deep into the jungle, a part of the Congo where no missionaries had ever been. Arriving in N’dolera, they were immediately barred from entering the village by a tribal leader. Undaunted, they set up house a half mile up the slope from the village.

Prayers for a spiritual breakthrough seemingly went unanswered as nothing happened. The only contact they had with the villagers was one small boy who sold them chickens and eggs. Svea seized the opportunity to talk to this young boy about Jesus, and he did eventually become a believer.

After discouragement caused the other couple to leave the village, tragedy also soon struck the Flood family. In the process of giving birth to their second child, Svea fell ill and died. Something snapped in David. He dug a crude grave for his wife and returned to the African coast, giving his newborn baby to an American missionary family, who renamed her Aggie. Aggie and her new family eventually returned to the United States, settling in South Dakota.

Years later, Aggie, much to her surprise, received a Swedish religious magazine, which contained a picture of a white cross with the words, “Svea Flood”, her birth mother. Having the article translated, she read the story of her birth parents and a young African convert. As this young man grew, he eventually led many of the villagers to Christ, including the chief. Because of the sacrifice of her birth parents, there were now 600 people following Jesus in this small village.
A few years later, Aggie and her husband traveled to Sweden to find her birth father, now 73 years old, still a bitter alcoholic angry at God. Aggie told him the incredible story of that transformed village, explaining that their work had not been in vain. Before the afternoon ended, her father had reconciled with both her and his Savior.

In yet another twist of remarkable providence, Aggie attended an international conference in England where one of the primary speakers was an African man from Congo. In interacting with him, she discovered that he was, in fact, that young African convert who had brought eggs and chickens to her parents. He was now the superintendent of the National Church of Congo with over 110,000 believers.

Aggie went to visit her mother's grave and was welcomed by cheering throngs of villagers. The message that Sunday at the village was John 12:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”, ending with Psalms 126:5, “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!”

A story like this can, no doubt, inspire some Christians to leave their countries and become overseas missionaries. However, proper motivation for carrying the gospel to foreign lands becomes critical when one encounters trials, temptations, disappointment and apparent failure. This booklet will attempt to explore not only our motivations for service overseas, but also be a simple introduction and guide for those who are considering overseas missions. Other valuable sources have been included at the end of the booklet for help in the preparation process.
1. **Our Motivations – Good and Bad**

The Bible instructs us to be as neither a horse nor a mule. The horse runs ahead, out of control while the mule obstinately stands its ground and refuses to move. Janice, my wife, and I often laugh as we, respectively, see ourselves as the mule and the horse. I can easily say, “Let's go!” while she exclaims, “Hold on a moment!” I remember Janice asking me many “why” questions even before we were married. I often struggled with knowing how to answer.

So when it came to moving to Italy, the same question came up. “Why do you feel God is leading us to Europe?” Janice asked these questions not with an unsubmitive spirit, but a genuine desire to understand how God was leading us. The Lord used these questions to help purge my motivations and think through what the primary motivation should be.

So why do people pack their bags and leave their homes and families for the sake of the gospel? For some, it might be the thrill of adventure; for others, love and compassion for the lost; and for others, a simple desire to obey Christ's command to go and make disciples, even to the ends of the earth.

When all is said and done, the greatest reason to do any kind of ministry is our love for Jesus Christ. The first and greatest commandment demands the kind of love for God which involves our total being. A popular song suggests that when Jesus hung dying on the cross, His only thought was of us. It's a nice sentiment, but not, at least in my opinion, accurate. From eternity past, this love relationship existed among the Triune Godhead. Love sent Jesus to die on the cross, but I believe it was primarily love for the Father which really kept Him there.
Unless we are motivated primarily by the love of Christ, a life of sacrifice and service can easily become hollow and meaningless. Nelson Guerra, who has a powerful and effective ministry in Latin America, once gave a riveting talk to pastors from all over the world. He confessed that for years, it seemed like his love for ministry had become the driving motivation in his life. He repented and began to change and allow his love for Jesus to supplant his love for ministry.

It is also easy to think of ourselves. We all to varying degrees entertain thoughts of self. The more we do this, however, the easier it becomes for this self-thought to slowly slip into a desire for recognition by others. When we opt for self-glory, we are on very shaky ground, for the Lord declares He will not share His glory with another.

Without love for Christ as the fundamental motivating principle in our lives, we run the risk of causing more damage than good for the kingdom of God. When life's challenges and temptations come our way—and they will—it can be all too easy to allow serious sin, discouragement, disillusionment and tension in relationships to derail us from our initial desire to serve God.

I encountered such an experience when I had been in Italy three years. Clearly not a linguist, I had been struggling in my language acquisition but felt like I was making progress. However, my language teacher thought otherwise and said as much to me. Her words attacked my heart in a way I could not even explain and I remember after that day not wanting to even leave our home.

Several Sundays later, I excused myself from our Christmas festivities, saying I felt sick. But it was really sickness of heart. Once at home, I found a list of God's promises that our daughter Erin had prepared for a good friend. Jeremiah 31:3 struck me: “I have loved you with an everlasting love”. Desperately needing something fresh from the Lord, I
began to read this verse in context, starting a few chapters earlier. God then gave me a new life verse: “I will bring him near and he will come close to Me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to Me?”(Jer. 30:21). I began to cry, because I knew that I was not that man.

I read it again in as many different translations as I could find. This became my expanded version of the verse:

“I will bring him near, and he will come close to Me, for who is he who will devote himself or risk his life, and even dare to pledge his heart, to be close to Me? declares the Lord.”

At that point, the Lord began to restore my heart. The following week, I spent three days alone with Him, where He burned on my heart afresh His tremendous love for me and that He must be my foremost love and only sufficiency. The words of this song, “Draw Me Close to You”, became my heartbeat in this recovery period.

**DRAW ME CLOSE TO YOU**

Draw me close to You
Never let me go
I lay it all down again
To hear You say that I'm Your friend

You are my desire
No one else will do
'Cause nothing else could take Your place
To feel the warmth of Your embrace
Help me find the way
Bring me back to You

You're all I want
You're all I've ever needed
You're all I want
Help me know You are near
Application and Action Step:
One of the best principles that I have been able to apply since the early 1990s is what Doug Brown calls a DAWG day (Day Alone with God). Since 1993, I have been trying to spend at least one day per month alone with the Lord. I realized that during the months right before I experienced a type of mid-life crisis, I had stopped having DAWG days.

1. DAWG days are critical to keep us focused on what God calls important. Start having a DAWG Day at least once per month. Even if you feel your DAWG day did not go well, KEEP IT UP. If necessary, get help from a friend on how to spend a day alone with God.

2. During your first DAWG Day, get before God and answer the question, “Why do you think God is leading you to move to another culture for the sake of the gospel?” Write your answer.

3. Honestly examine your motivations before God. Pray and ask Him to help you be as honest as possible, knowing that rarely do any of us have perfectly pure motivations. Confess any selfish motivations and ask God to purge them and further refine and purify your more pure motives.

4. Share the discoveries of the day with your spouse or a close friend. Ask them to pray for God's continued leading in your life.
2. Our Authority – Christ, the Word of God, and the Church

Equally important as pure motivations is our submission to God-given authorities. Being under His authority and our earthly authorities is a type of protection for our lives, ensuring that we not move too fast or go in directions that are contrary to the Lord's will.

Our supreme authority is the triune God, our Heavenly Father, Jesus our Savior and the Holy Spirit who guides us through His Word. I love how Jesus' Great Commission begins, “All authority in heaven and on earth...” Using this authority, Jesus gives His command, “Go, therefore, and make disciples.” Five times Jesus gives this type of Great Commission command to his followers. Today God uses the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to lead and guide His disciples. Indispensable to every believer serious in his walk with the Lord is a reverent and dedicated commitment to the Word of God and the heart to obey it.

However, God also uses biblically-based undershepherds, or local church leadership, to guide and direct us in His excellent and perfect will for our lives. The church, God's chosen instrument in accomplishing His Great Commission, is also the physical manifestation of the glory of God. Through her, God's people are equipped for the work of service and demonstrate that God is living in our midst today.

Three primary purposes and ministries for the church are described in the Word of God: (1) ministry to God through praise and worship; (2) ministry to believers through equipping and nurturing the members of the community; and (3) ministry to the world through evangelism and deeds of mercy. Healthy churches keep these three purposes in balance without overemphasizing one or two at the expense of the others.
The heartbeat of almost every leader in the beginning years of the Great Commission church movement was to go to the ends of the earth with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This Acts 1:8 vision was foundational for our movement, seeing ourselves fulfilling the core value of reaching all nations with the gospel, even in our generation. Acts 1:8 is often used to encourage a geographic expansion of the gospel: first to our city, then our region or state, and then to the remotest parts of the world. However, the New Testament church model seemed to exhibit a broader application of this verse.

Acts 1:8 says we are to take the gospel to Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the remotest parts of the world. To fulfill Jesus’ command, churches are to be simultaneously involved in both local ministry and sending workers to more distant mission fields, and even to the ends of the earth. In the first century, the gospel expanded to the whole known world, while believers were also still working in their Jerusalems, Judeas and Samarias. These first-century churches were filled with fully devoted disciples, who reached their world for Christ in their generation.

Leadership development is often viewed as one of the limiting factors in the spread of the gospel or the starting of new churches. When leaders within a church always continue in their existing roles as senior pastors (either by name or perception), it can passively limit their faith, the faith of developing leaders, and even the faith of the congregation. This, in turn, stifles the development of new leaders. However, when seasoned pastors take a step of faith and launch a new church or step into international missions, it not only serves as examples for our churches, but also makes room for other leaders to fill their roles, expanding the number of leaders within the movement. Fortunately, we have many examples of pastors who have done just that.

A long-time pastor and church-planter in the United States for over 35 years just recently moved to India. He felt
the burden to obey the Great Commission even to the ends of the earth, realizing that if we are to reach the world for Christ, it was necessary to start moving overseas. However, before making a final decision, he consulted and received the blessing of his co-pastor and other leaders in the Great Commission church movement. He and his wife currently work with different Christian groups among the Muslims and Hindu and Sikh, as he remains united with and accountable to a number of people in India and the States.

The experience of Andy Sanchez, a seasoned elder, exemplifies another solid principle of unanimous agreement among leaders within the church. Andy had felt called to start a new church in a nearby community, their Judea perhaps. However, there was not unanimous agreement and so he waited and prayed. He continued to voice his desires, but also to wait upon God's confirmation through total agreement within the leadership. When it came, and only then, Andy launched a new church plant. Such humility and submission must be a “fragrant aroma” to the Lord Himself.

If God does not give unanimous consent within the leadership of a church, it is likely that He is calling us to either stay or wait for His perfect timing. Any number of reasons may be behind the wait: changes may need to occur in our lives or within our family; the church may not be strong enough to weather the loss of one of its pastors; or for reasons only the Lord knows. But this principle of unanimous agreement must also be balanced with the biblical principle of stepping out in faith and “getting out of the boat.” The remaining leadership also must exercise faith, since sometimes the loss of a key leader will significantly stretch their lives as well.

When there is a new church plant or a new missionary joining the work in Europe, Great Commission Europe is committed to applying a principle called “The Round Table”. The key element in this approach is communication. The Greek word Koinōnia means communion by intimate participation.
The word is used frequently in the New Testament to describe the relationships within the first-century church.

In the Round Table figure, there are four entities that need to communicate often in the process of starting a new church or sending a new missionary: 1) The Planted or Receiving Church, 2) the Sending Church or Ministry, 3) the Great Commission Europe regional fellowship, and 4) the Ministering laborer(s). There needs to be a high emphasis on mutual communication to clarify the objectives, the responsibilities and the relationships. It is important to communicate who will have the primary authority in which phase of the process. Who will be responsible for the training of the people or coaching them once they are on the field?

Our own experience was a lesson in waiting as well. From the time I first felt led to pursue international missions to its actual fulfillment was about eight years. I recall vividly
when Herschel Martindale, our European missions director, called to tell me that “it is not the right time” to go overseas. I hung up the phone and started to cry. Little did I know that more disappointment and waiting lay ahead for us. However, after a “failed” psychology test and serious health problems for Janice's mother derailed “our” plans, the time eventually came for us “to set sail for Italy.”

During this process, it was necessary to be persistent. We likely would have stopped had I not been convinced that this really was God’s will for us. In retrospect, I have come to truly appreciate all the care and effort those in authority in my life took to make sure that this move would be right and best for our lives. God is the same way. He only wants our very best, and He will use the authorities in our lives to help lead and guide us in His excellent and perfect will for our lives.

Application and Actions Steps:

1. If you feel that God is leading you to be part of an overseas mission process, as an individual, as part of a team, or even a number of people from the same family, the first thing you need to do is share this with your pastor and leadership team. They can give you an objective perspective and advice on how to proceed.

2. A question which might be posed to you will be: “How are you currently involved in sharing your faith?” The truth is that if you are not involved in the gospel right where you are now, you probably will not be that involved when you go overseas. The good news is a simple solution exists: start sharing your faith!

3. Ask counsel and questions from as many people you can find who have been or are missionaries. Prayerfully consider how you can use their advice and learn from them. If you have a specific country in
mind, plan on taking a trip there or begin to network with people who have already ministered in that part of the world.

4. If you are a pastor or church leader, consider how you can better prepare your church to reach not only your Jerusalem and Judea, but also Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. Usually every healthy church has a number of people who have the gift of evangelism or whom God has given a deeper heart for world evangelism. These people can be a real catalyst within your church when they are properly directed and focused in ministry. Many churches have an annual missions conference which has the benefit of motivating Christians to not only give to missions, but also envision some to go.

5. If your church does not have an annual missions conference, consider taking initiative to plan one. Talk to your pastor and get his approval and help. Resources online abound. A simple search “planning a missions conference” yields a goldmine of resources and ideas.
3. Our Family – Strength Within

“The family should be a closely knit group. The home should be a self-contained shelter of security; a kind of school where life's basic lessons are taught; and a kind of church where God is honored; a place where wholesome recreation and simple pleasures are enjoyed” – Billy Graham, “My Answer”, syndicated newspaper column.

The strength and unity of the family cannot be overemphasized. Our association of churches places immense value on the necessity of raising godly families:

“We believe that strong families are fundamental for the physical, social, emotional and spiritual development of each individual; for healthy relational patterns within the church; and for stability in society. Strong families produce strong churches and strong communities...

Common Practices
- When we evaluate a married man for leadership, we look at the strength of his marriage and his family before evaluating his ministry skills and other credentials...
- Our practice is to encourage families to be 'on-mission,' actively involved in evangelism, discipleship, and church-planting.”

Character can often define and sometimes determine the effects of a ministry, whether at home or abroad. While no family can claim perfection, fundamental necessities include a Christ-centered focus, the ability to quickly resolve conflicts, mutual respect and honor, and, of course, love and unity.

For strong families, a way to further strengthen and envision the family is to be involved in overseas missions.
Short-term mission trips are a great place to begin preparing the family; however, it is crucial to realize the importance of long-term involvement in cross-cultural outreach. The Great Commission will not be realized through short-term service alone. Imagine the impact of children realizing that “Every Nation in Our Generation” is not just a song we sing, but a lifestyle we live.

A myriad of resources is available for those seeking to develop a strong family, but one of the most important principles we can practice is that of accountability, regularly meeting with couples in open and honest relationships. These types of life transformation groups, where difficult questions are asked, will help sharpen and refine our lives and families.

Another indispensable principle is that of the father assuming spiritual leadership of the home. After many “false starts,” I was finally able to establish a regular time of family devotions, reading the Word together and helping us to discover God's will and heart. I used these times and meal times to introduce the possibility of our family eventually going overseas. Years later, one of our daughters commented, “It seemed not so much a question of ‘if’, but rather 'when and where’.” Preparation of the family is essential before considering a move overseas and this ideally starts when they are still young.

The Great Commission Churches have developed a 2020 strategic vision and plan, part of which includes a strategy to encourage families to be teamed together in the same geographical area, to reach people together in that city, state or country. This has the advantage of promoting the advancement of the gospel combined with families maintaining a responsibility to each other in the spirit of Deut. 6:2 and 1 Timothy 5:8. There are many advantages to this strategy, and family unity in the Gospel is definitely a high priority. Families that are truly Great Commission families may stay together and be teamed together in the gospel, while other Great
Commission families might be led by God to travel to different parts of the world, accepting the sacrifice of not being physically close to the people they love for their calling in Christ.

With the technology of today, it is possible to stay closely connected and have deep conversations even over thousands of miles, and international travel is relatively easy. Since moving to Europe, for example, I have found that my relationship with my mother has significantly deepened. I Skype her for a short call 5-6 times per week while I am in Europe, but when I am in the States, I may call her only about once per week and see her maybe once per month even though we are in the same city. We try to Skype our daughter and get to “see” our grandson almost every day.

Today, a type of family unity is possible even from different parts of the world, but regardless of this technological advancement, for those who feel called to overseas ministry, the priority of being united and close to our family needs to be held in balance with our calling and our primary love for Jesus. His clear command is to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Jesus made it clear that loving Him and obeying Him needs to be foremost in our hearts, as Jesus said in Matthew 10:37, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Jesus also said that following Him will require sacrifices. There are definite sacrifices associated with being distant from parents, children and grandchildren. But our awesome God promises to give us even more in return (along with persecutions). In Mark 10:29-30 “Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in
the age to come, eternal life.”

Clearly different stages of life require different preparation and some knowledge of the potential obstacles which come with them. We will take a quick look at these stages, from singlehood to the empty nest.

1) Unmarried missionaries

Although at first glance it would seem unmarried individuals have an easier time making a radical lifestyle change to overseas ministry, unique challenges await them as well. Parental concerns are generally higher when their single son or daughter pursues a call to international missions. Once on the field, one of the common struggles will be that of loneliness, and if the new ministry is filled with young married couples, a sense of isolation.

Although temptations are universal, the single person is especially vulnerable. In many countries public nudity (posters, beaches, etc.) is acceptable and the norm. Single men might struggle with pornography even more so overseas. Italian TV, by Christian standards, is pornographic. Single women, discontent in their singleness, might easily be flattered by the male attention they receive by international men who might be much more forward and aggressive. It goes without saying that if singles struggle with these or other potentially weakening issues, the time to address them is before they actually move overseas. Accountability groups and older, wiser mentors are highly encouraged.

2) Newly Married Couples

Our general counsel for newlyweds is to wait at least a year and perhaps even longer, before embarking on an overseas mission process. Often the stress of cross-cultural adaptation (even in English-speaking countries) can put too much strain on a couple already dealing with adjustments to marital life. It is
imperative that parents and/or pastors and spiritual mentors become involved in the decision-making process of the time frame for newlyweds to begin pursuing overseas missions.

3) Missionary Couples

When a married couple considers moving overseas for the gospel, two of the major concerns are strength of relationship and unity. It is important that the couple be experienced in resolving conflicts, handling stressful situations together and knowing how to encourage one another.

It is also not uncommon for a young, driven husband to feel called to the mission field while the wife remains ambivalent, especially realizing all the sacrifices such an undertaking will exact. She may have a strong faith and trust in the Lord allowing her to follow her husband wholeheartedly in this decision, feeling that her calling is primarily to honor, support and submit to her husband. If, however, one of the spouses is strongly opposed to the move, it is imperative to seek the Lord together and allow Him to bring unity in the decision-making process. This principle would be true for every married couple, whether they have children or not.

A couple without children will have a greater amount of freedom and availability than certainly those with young children. They can focus on language acquisition and maneuver their way through cultural challenges without the added stress of children's needs. Their schedules will only have to be coordinated between them, adding much flexibility to a completely different kind of life.

However, one problem which could arise more quickly is getting adjusted to spending almost every waking hour with your spouse. This phenomenon, usually reserved for retirement, may come as quite a rude awakening for some. With children, the pressure is usually diffused, but when it is only the two of you, things can get tense. Another potential
adjustment might be if the couple decides to have a baby in the new country, which is a challenge for any first-time parents. The fear of the unknown, a new culture and language, and little understanding of the medical institutions make it a more stressful situation. Some missionaries have opted to birth their babies in their home country.

4) Missionary Couples With Young Children

Two of the greatest challenges for families with young children will be the added stress and pressure of cross-cultural adaptation in an already demanding season of life and the decision-making process regarding the education of their children.

Raising young children brings with it a myriad of responsibilities: discipline, character training, family standards, and educational choices. And these can all fly in the face of a new culture which may undermine the very values parents are trying to instill in their children. For those who homeschooled in the United States, it is important to realize that this may not be an option in the newly adopted country. Some opt for international schools, others for Christian schools, and still others choose a public school in order to immerse their children into the new culture and language.

The most important ingredient here is parental involvement. Whether one chooses homeschooling or private or public options, parents must maintain vigilance in what is being taught to their children. A biblical worldview taught by the parents is one of the greatest weapons against secular humanism and postmodernism.

5) Missionary Couples With Teenagers

Among some mission organizations, there is a consensus that an overseas move with high school-aged
children presents unacceptably high risks and, therefore, is not encouraged, or even, permitted. It is true that in this season of life teenagers begin developing their own values and convictions which may present unique challenges. Teenagers sometimes move from being family-dependent to peer-dependent, and face opposition to the biblical worldview and Christian faith of their childhood. A number of missionaries from the Great Commission church movement have moved overseas with teen-aged children and a survey of their experiences was taken to obtain their insights on their move.

When asked to rate (from 1-10) how the move affected them in various aspects of their life, the average response was as follows:

- Socially – 8;
- Emotionally – 6; and
- Spiritually – 8.

All of them said it was a good experience. When asked if they would do it over again, all said yes, some commenting, “In a heartbeat”, “100% yes”, “Definitely”, “For sure, it shaped who I am in a good way.”

Leaving family and friends was understandably the greatest challenge, along with learning a new language and developing friendships in the new culture. Thoughts were also shared on how to better prepare the family: (1) “Start at birth, letting them know that they might move overseas for the gospel”; (2) acknowledge the difficulties and listen to their fears and potential reservations; (3) give as much advanced notice as possible and stress the long-term benefits; (4) language training; and (5) provide opportunities to talk with other missionaries on what to expect.

It is also important to make preliminary trips to where you will be moving. Ideally teens participate with their parents in short-term mission trips to their new location. This will not
only remove some of the unknowns from the move, but also God will likely have begun working in their hearts, and they also will feel called to missions. Often short-term mission trips have the effect of leaving some of our heart where we ministered, and there is often a desire to return.

Some missionary teens said the move strengthened their family, and family relationships improved as a result of their experience. Though difficult times were endured, many thought the end result was positive, in that they were forced to step out in faith and were also much more understanding of other peoples and cultures.

Wise parents need to walk a fine line between allowing their children input on a potential move overseas and making the ultimate decision, based on God's leading. Teens need to be listened to and must feel as though they are being listened to and understood. Since teens become part of the mission team, their opinions and feelings must be considered and teen children must be a united part of your team.

If we are to live our core values of strong families and the Great Commission, we should not automatically disqualify a family or discourage a family from considering overseas missions solely on the basis of having teen-aged children. Within the Great Commission church movement, there is a high priority on raising up our children as Great Commission disciples. Pastors are encouraged to make that goal a priority in decision-making. Fathers are urged to make this their focus. A father should ask himself, his wife and his children if a move will further that goal or be a stumbling block to that goal. If there are teens, it would be ideal if the teens have the same conviction of being called as do the parents. Younger teens may have sufficient faith in God and their parents to follow the leading of their parents under their authority, perhaps without having their own personal call. There is a big difference between a 13-year-old and a 17-year-old teenager. If the family is united in their vision and calling to move overseas in a desire
to fulfill the Great Commission, then it is likely that this move overseas for the sake of the Gospel will only serve to strengthen this vision and further unite their family around God’s calling and purpose in their lives.

6) Empty Nesters

Many baby boomers are now empty nesters. Tremendous potential resides in this stage of life as well as unique challenges and considerations. Seasoned believers, having already weathered many of life's storms, are often more stable and more mature than younger missionaries. With more years, one often has more wisdom, biblical knowledge and experience.

However, it is also a time of life when the proper care of aging parents must be considered and ensured. Oftentimes a sibling left behind takes on the primary responsibility of parental care, but it is still difficult dealing with parents' increased medical problems and not be nearby to help. A good principle to follow is to make decisions such that after our parents have passed on, we do not have to live with serious regrets.

Entering the mission field late in life also brings with it certain insecurities and revelations. It took me several years of being in Torino to realize that I was no longer considered a peer of the university student! The notion; however, that we are too old for the mission field is one that should be dispelled immediately. Though it is true that the university students will never see us as peers, it is also just as true that they are in need of mentors and more often than not, parental figures. Frank and Pam Apisa, our co-workers here in Italy, are wonderful examples of those who bridge the age gap and minister powerfully to the students.
7) Adult Children Who are Left Behind

Adult children who were left behind when their parents chose overseas missions were asked to share their thoughts and feelings about the process. Their responses are included here.

− “Their move was, of course, very emotional for me. I was thrilled on one hand to have parents who were so committed, so faithful.”

− “As time went on and I faced trials in marriage or parenting, my parents were largely limited to counseling and comforting me over the phone. In many ways this was no different than I had ever expected.”

− “In many ways, their physical absence has only accelerated the process of adulthood for each of us. They are not available to solve all our problems. We have had to seek the Lord on our own and make grown-up choices while many of our peers seem to fall back on their parents all too quickly. We are all learning as we go but overall the process, while difficult, has been very healthy.”

− “I'm pretty sure it would feel the same way if they lived across the U.S. Or even several hours away but it is still hard and I miss them and wish they were more a part of my daily life.”

− “I think the hardest part is that I love my parents and respect them so much, it is just hard to share them with the rest of the world. But, with all that said, I'm so proud of them.”

− “They are a strong example to me of how one must give up his life to save it—every aspect of this life,
including your children, might have to be given up at some point in order to follow Christ.”

− “For me, I was living at home my first year of college, so when they moved overseas I moved in with my oldest brother who was still single at the time. The transition probably hit me the hardest as my older brothers and sisters had already pretty much settled in to their independent lives.”

− “Not having the option to go 'home' on the weekends while in college was not easy.”

− “My parents' decision to make this move was my decision too, but God does not call us to make comfortable choices where we see the outcome. He calls us to make disciples of all nations and leave even the people and things we love to show others the purpose of life and how to live it. I still talk to my parents frequently as they will always be a huge part of my life and the role models of Christ's love I aspire to be like; knowing they are being role models for the people around them could not be more encouraging. Their story gives my story the doors to share the gospel where I am on the other side of the world.”

Key ingredients to relational/emotional stability on the mission field when leaving behind adult children are the importance of frequent communication and availability for those in crisis or need. With Skype (an on-line free computer to computer video conferencing program) and the ease of overseas communication, this is no longer a difficulty or financial burden.
8) Our Church Family

For some, a church family becomes more of a support than their actual physical family. In any case, it is important that the sending church gives support to its missionaries in ways other than just finances. This may happen initially but then diminish as the years go by. The missionaries themselves can help in this process by keeping in good contact with and making known their prayer needs to their church family.

Ways in which the sending church can bless its missionaries include mailing care packages (especially with items not available in the country they reside); delegating a small group to obtain specific prayer requests and pray for them regularly; sending short-term mission groups which encourages the missionaries while envisioning the sending church; and allowing the missionaries to share ministry updates when they are available during home service.

Application and Action Steps:

1. A strong family is necessary for successful ministry. Pray and ask the Lord to reveal weaknesses in your family or things which could become weaknesses while ministering on a foreign field. Ask Him to identify at least three areas where you can grow and strengthen your family.

2. For each area identified as a weakness, pray and ask the Lord to give you a plan on how to strengthen them and the grace to be vigilant.

3. Identify each person in your family who will be affected by your potential move overseas. Pray for God's wisdom and understanding on how to help them accept and adjust to this change in their lives.
4. Pray and ask the Lord how He might want to use you as an instrument in His hands to develop more of a Great Commission mindset in your church.
4. **Our Preparation – Where to Begin**

Once the call to overseas missions has been confirmed, our biblical authorities are in agreement and our family is strong and united, it is necessary to begin actively preparing. Herschel Martindale, a pastor for over 50 years and former European Missions director, poses the following questions for those considering overseas missions:

1. Have you been baptized?
2. Have you established a daily habit of reading and obeying the Scriptures?
3. Have you learned how to be filled with the Holy Spirit regularly?
4. Have you learned how to quickly repent from sin and claim God's forgiveness?
5. Do you meet with a church and small group faithfully?
6. Do you share the gospel with others whenever God gives you an opportunity?
7. Have you “made a disciple” in the past six months?
8. Have you developed the habit of sacrificial prayer as a priority?
9. Have you learned how to humble yourself to God and others regularly?
10. Have you developed a habit of loving and putting others ahead of yourself?

Honestly answering these questions and developing these godly habits should and will be an ongoing process in our lives.

Three options for entering overseas missionary service will be considered here: (1) through a mission agency; (2) through tent-making; and (3) through a local church. The best option for you may depend upon many different factors.
Mission Agencies

The most common way to serve overseas as a missionary is to go through a mission agency, such as Great Commission Ministries. Requirements generally include an application, an interview and usually some type of psychological testing. Based on the results of the test, it might be necessary to undergo some counseling. The investment of time and money in the training and sending process makes it imperative to ensure that potential missionaries are fit for service. My wife and I were required to see a counselor and though it was initially difficult, it proved to be a rewarding experience for both of us.

Although the process of going through a mission agency generally takes longer and is more difficult, the benefits are many. Training in the support-raising process and handling of financial issues, including reimbursements, insurance and retirement benefits, are two of the main services the mission agency provides. It also provides a good authority structure; it simplifies the gift-giving for the donors; and mission agencies usually understand the missionary's needs and can, therefore, better help meet those needs.

Tent-Making

A tent-maker, like the Apostle Paul, is one who moves overseas for the purpose of sharing the gospel, but works in the local economy to provide for his own needs. Tent-makers may constitute the entire missionary force in a country which is closed to full-time missionaries, such as the Muslim nations. The benefits to tent-making are obvious: (1) no need for a financial support base; (2) natural immersion into the culture; (3) language acquisition may be easier, working with nationals.

However, one misconception may exist in the mind of the tent-maker: that it will be easy to find a job or start a business overseas. Experience has proven that this often is not
the case. If this option is being seriously considered, it is important to make contact with Christians inside the country for help and support in the process. Without this, it might be impossible to proceed legally and effectively as a tent-maker.

Local Church

Being funded and supported fully or partially through a local church is becoming more common these days. The advantage to this is that there are no or only minimum administrative fees charged by the church. Since the supporters are donating to the church, there is also a tax deduction. One warning to this way of supporting a missionary is that there may be some scrutiny by the IRS, and churches must make sure that there is no “channeling” of funds. It is critical that funds be clearly under the direction of the church's financial or legal board. It is prudent to include a professional tax consultant or accountant in the planning process.

Regardless of which method a missionary chooses to support himself, visa acquisition and legal permissions to stay in the country will be issues which need to be addressed. Laws and requirements differ for each country, so it will be necessary to research the process and find the consulate office for the country being considered. It can be a long and daunting process so it is important that the application process be started as soon as possible. In our case, we enjoyed the benefit of joining an already existing ministry, with our co-laborers walking through many of the transition steps with us. However, even with that, the visa process delayed our arrival in Torino six months after we were ready to go.

Prayer is and always will be one of the most powerful resources for your ministry, and it is highly recommended that you have a team of prayer warriors in place before you leave the country. Begin writing regular ministry prayer letters for your prayer support team, both for prayer requests and for highlighting answers to prayer. A simple truth to remember is
“Prayer is not the beginning of the battle or a part of the battle; it is the battle” (author unknown). Oswald Chambers has also written, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.”

Another final step in the preparation process should be focused training on what to expect with your move and the language acquisition process. One of the best training programs available is Mission Training International (MTI at www.mti.org). Two programs exist which should be required for every foreign missionary, whether funded by a mission agency, a local church or a tent-maker. The first is called SPLICE, which is a two-week course on preparation for entering a new culture. The second MTI course is called PILAT, which is a two-week program in language acquisition techniques. Both of these programs (or something similar) are vital for you and your family, and are required for those sent by mission agencies. They come highly recommended by missionaries who have participated in them, and it is well worth the financial and time investment for your move overseas.

Application and Action Steps

1. During one of your DAWG days, review the ten areas of personal faithfulness in the beginning of this section. Pray and ask God to identify which areas need to be strengthened and prioritize them. Pray and take steps to strengthen these areas.

2. Seek an accountability partner (a trusted friend or spouse) who will help you stay on course with these action steps.

3. Pray and seek counsel for the best way to move overseas, whether through a mission agency, as a tent-maker, or through your local church. Begin making the necessary arrangements or contacts to begin this process.
4. Begin researching the visa requirements, seeking help from companies such as “Travisa” which, for a fee, will work with the appropriate foreign consulate offices in the visa application and approval process. Better yet would be a contact within the country who is willing to help you in this process.

5. Develop a prayer support team, staying in contact with them even before you leave.

6. It is not always plausible, but if it is at all possible, begin language acquisition Stateside. Personal teachers, community college courses and language partners are all ways one can familiarize oneself with the language even before departure.

7. Plan and schedule your departure training with MTI or some other similar program. Raising special support may also be necessary for the costs involved in the move overseas.
5. Our Move – Just the Beginning

A special word of confirmation from God, though not necessary, is so helpful in the process of moving overseas. Fear of the unknown and leaving family and relationships behind presented much more of a challenge for Janice and our daughters than for me. However, late in the process of moving after having raised almost all of our necessary support, the Lord gave this verse to Janice which sealed the move in her heart.

Acts 27:1 “And when it was decided that we should set sail for Italy...”

Many practical considerations also must be addressed in making this monumental move overseas. Housing, shipping and language acquisition are some of the issues which can present unique challenges when the move is international.

Housing

It is not easy finding a home in a new country. Laws and controls often make the task so much more daunting than in the States where there is more freedom. Knowing someone in the country you are moving to is a great asset because they are familiar with the location and language. However, when no one is available, being a native English speaker works to your advantage as generally speaking, you can always find people familiar with the English language.

Things you will want to find out in the house-hunting process are safe neighborhoods, types of and longevity of rental contracts and expenses incurred in the rental process. For example, in Italy, a rental agreement is usually 4-8 years in length, a very expensive realtor fee is charged even for a rental contract and the security deposit can be up to 3 months' rent. Thus, moving costs are probably much higher than you might imagine and should be considered when raising support. In
Italy, we found very few freestanding homes for rent and that became quite an adjustment in itself as well. Learning to respect neighbors with noise level and late hours presented quite a challenge for us, who were used to living alone in our own home.

If at all possible, it might be wise for the husband to go early and find housing before the rest of the family arrives. Otherwise, it will be necessary to have a place to stay for an extended amount of time. We were able to move into our new apartment within the first week of our arrival, but our furniture was held ransom by the Italian government for two months. Expect surprises!

A number of options are available when it comes to your home and possessions, and of course, this will be dependent upon the intended amount of time you will spend in the new country: (1) Selling everything; (2) Storing everything; (3) Bringing all or part of belongings. We opted for the third as it considerably decreased our expenses since we knew someone in the international shipping business who cut the price in half. In any case, one piece of advice which made sense was to bring along some items which remind you of home and evoke good memories. For those on a limited budget, there is also the option of renting a furnished house or apartment.

Language Acquisition

As was mentioned earlier, language acquisition can and should start in the States before one's departure. Many of the comments from the young people who were surveyed included regrets that they had not learned the language a little before the move. However, once you are on foreign soil, the importance of language acquisition cannot be overstated. There will be serious challenges adapting to your new culture if you or any family members do not learn the language. Below are some tips to help you with the language acquisition process.
1. Shortly after arriving, find a tutor or language school.

2. Develop a personal language acquisition plan with measurable goals for hours of effort in three areas: (1) Classes or language conversation partners (recommended 20-25 hrs/wk); (2) Active learning and personal language study (recommended 5-10 hrs/wk); and (3) Passive learning and listening (recommended 5-10 hrs/wk).

3. Log in your hours in each category everyday, and find a personal language coach or someone you can be accountable to with the implementation of your language plan. Share that plan with them and plan to meet with them at least two times per month.

4. It is recommended and, in my opinion, imperative that the first year be entirely devoted to language acquisition. Ministry should be limited to only those things which will aid in the acquisition of the target language. After the first year, your language progress should be evaluated to determine if continued language training is necessary.

5. Even for international church pastors teaching in English, language acquisition would be encouraged as many international church participants are not fluent in English and nationals become members.

6. One exception to focused language acquisition training might be for an older missionary who will likely only be in-country for a relatively short time, and it is intended that translators will always be used while doing ministry.
Promises from the Word of God

Probably the most important foundation for your move will be your promises from the Word of God as well as your life verses. These, more than anything else, will help sustain you in your transition process so it is good to always keep them before you and your family. Someone counseled Frank Apisa, the founding pastor of the church in Torino who has since moved to start a new church in Milano, to read and study the book of Deuteronomy during the final weeks before embarking on his church-planting efforts in Italy. Moses wrote this book as a final exhortation for the people of Israel as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land, so this is a very good preparation step.

Application and Action Steps

1. Make efforts to obtain some local help in the city where you will be moving. It is always good to find support and friendship among the existing Christian community, so that they see you as co-laborers and not competition.

2. Decide if you will find a place before moving, or if you will be hosted by someone immediately upon your arrival. Make the necessary arrangements depending upon your decision.

3. Begin thinking about and planning for your move, especially your current household possessions.

4. Develop a preliminary language acquisition plan and upon arrival, find a personal language coach. Work together on your language progress.

5. Begin asking the Lord for special promises and words of encouragement from His Word, and during one or even a couple of your DAWG days, study the book of
Deuteronomy. Share your promises and insights with your prayer team.
6. Our Adjustment – What to Expect

Shortly after arrival in our new country, the excitement kicks in as everything seems to be so strange and new. We'd been preparing for this for well over a year, and now the day has come. We have finally arrived. However, it does not take long for the excitement to wear off and we begin to experience a myriad of other emotions which can be difficult to explain.

Not too long after we had first arrived, we went with some visitors to a nearby lake. Janice and I got separated, and as she was searching for me, an older Italian man looked over at her. She decided to take the plunge and engage the man in conversation. “Cercho un marito” she said timidly, at which the man smiled broadly and asked, “Quanti mariti cerchi?” She then realized what she had said. Instead of saying, “I'm looking for my husband”, she had actually said, “I'm looking for a husband”. The man had replied, “How many husbands are you looking for?”

This was just one of many embarrassing moments we encountered and the beginning of what is commonly called “culture shock”. If you attend the Missionary Training International courses, you will become very familiar with what this is and how to minimize its effects on your life and relationships. This section will give you just a brief overview of what you have to look forward to.

Culture shock is what happens when a person from one culture is immersed into a different culture, and the clash of cultures begins. It can even occur within a country, for example, when someone from New York moves to Texas; it can happen between two English-speaking countries, like England and Australia; and, of course, as in our case, crossing an ocean can really get the process moving.
Culture shock often consists of distinct phases: (1) the honeymoon phase; (2) the crisis phase; (3) the recovery phase; and (4) the adjustment phase. There are no fixed symptoms ascribed to culture shock as each person is affected differently and some are not in their new culture long enough to traverse all of these phases. Each phase will be briefly explained along with some tips for overcoming the negative effects of culture shock.

The Honeymoon Phase is the romantic feelings we have when we first enter a new culture. Life is full of exploration with many new discoveries. The nationals are generally excited to meet a person from America. We get excited trying the new foods. We enjoy the different pace of life. However, as with newlyweds, the honeymoon doesn't last forever. After a relatively short period of time, real life sets in, with all its demands and challenges, only now in a new culture. It is important to know that not everyone experiences a honeymoon phase; some move right into crisis mode.

The Crisis Phase is the period when people need to negotiate through the new territory of their new culture. It usually occurs about three months after arrival (although this can vary, of course). During the crisis phase, the differences between the old and new cultures become marked, creating a wide range of emotions, mostly negative, such as anxiety, frustration and even anger. It is not uncommon to feel confused or embarrassed or even stupid, because the simplest things become a real challenge or obstacle in our lives. The differences which once seemed quaint now become irritating, strange, or just unacceptable. These feelings usually seem to revolve around the formidable language barrier, but other irritants might include the food, personal hygiene (or lack thereof), customs and even how people drive.

We begin to really miss the security and familiar places of our old culture (“normal” restrooms, grocery stores with actual choices). We miss the routines that used to make up
our lives back home. If we are not careful, we can adopt a “we” versus “they” mentality, with “their” culture always ending up on the short end of the stick. In extreme cases, serious mood swings can occur, resulting in isolation and depression. As more and more cultural differences gnaw at the person, severe disappointment and disillusionment can take its toll.

Our initial attitudes when culture shock hits us are, therefore, critical. If we can maintain an attitude of openness, acceptance and trust, our responses to the cultural differences will more likely be positive. As we navigate through culture shock, it is important to employ some positive coping strategies. Observing the nationals is a great way to learn their social taboos and nuances. Asking simple questions and listening intently to the responses can go a long way in understanding them. If we can remember phrases like “different, not wrong or strange”, we can dispel the tendency to judge the new culture.

People who successfully adapt to their new culture will eventually find a rapport or understanding of the culture that they did not have before, but those who remain critical will find themselves withdrawing from the culture, resulting in alienation and isolation. The latter will likely not survive long-term on the mission field.

The crisis phase can last anywhere from six to eighteen months upon arrival in your new culture. After this, people generally experience what some call the recovery and adjustment phases. These two will be discussed in the next section on Perseverance.

During the culture shock phase of our transition, a number of good disciplines can strengthen us in our trials. Staying recharged in the Lord is the responsibility of every Christian, but it is especially crucial when the new culture seems to be taking everything else out of us. Extra time with
the Lord, worshiping and singing, can often neutralize the effects of a bad encounter in the culture, not to mention fight off attacks from the evil one. The figure below is a very good diagram of the culture shock process.

Forbearance with others is another good habit to cultivate, since frustration with the culture can often result in taking it out on the ones closest to us, our spouse and children. Realize that you are not the only person experiencing the challenges of culture shock. Along the same lines, keep short accounts with others. Be quick to go and ask forgiveness. Be quick to forgive.

It is essential to pray often and with others. Personal prayer is important and necessary, but united prayer as a family or with co-laborers will likely do more to strengthen you and others around you.

Application and Action Steps

1. Talk through with your spouse and/or family members some of the adjustments you will be facing with your
move overseas. If necessary, do more research on the
topic of culture shock and/or encourage family
members to research it as well. Share information.

2. Together with your spouse, decide on a few
commitments you will make with one another to help
you through the process. Perhaps even write a short
covenant, incorporating some key biblical principles
that you especially want to hold to during the crisis
stage of culture shock. Include your children in this
process. Print it, sign it and maybe even display it on
the wall of your home. This will be a constant
reminder to one another and also a witness to your
guests on how you want to live by biblical principles.
7. Our Perseverance – The Team around Us

Frank Apisa, our founding pastor of the church in Torino, told me before we moved to Italy that we would pray together everyday once we joined them. My first thought was one of unbelief; it just wasn't realistic. However, thanks to Frank's passion for prayer and diligence in making it a priority, it really did happen. We are convinced that it was this discipline of prayer which held us together as a team, because we were all so different. At one point, we realized that we two couples represented all four of the temperaments (choleric, melancholy, phlegmatic and sanguine)! There is absolutely nothing more critical for team unity and success than regularly praying together.

Conflict among missionaries remains one of the major reasons for returning home. Therefore, staying humble and working to resolve all conflicts should be one of the highest priorities among staff. A new missionary especially is commonly very optimistic rather than realistic, which can be a good thing, but it also can breed critical thoughts toward the more seasoned missionaries. It is important that new missionaries stay humble and be primarily learners.

The recovery and adjustment stages occur when a person continues to be immersed in a culture not his own, but is beginning to embrace and adapt in it. One is learning to accept the new environment, adopt new ways of thinking and even beginning to feel like they belong in this new culture. This process takes years and some missionaries never complete it, never feeling quite comfortable in their new country.

Even more seasoned missionaries may feel tired, anxious, discouraged and a host of other emotions, without being able to explain why. Having passed through the crisis stage of cultural adaptation, and entering the recovery and adjustment stages, missionaries might still struggle with
cultural issues. Learning how to manage this ubiquitous challenge called “cultural stress” will be an important rite of passage in perseverance.

A missionary care website, www.missionarycare.com has a wealth of information for both new and inexperienced missionaries and much of the following information is taken from it:

Some major causes of culture stress:

- **Involvement.** The more you become personally involved in the culture, the more culture stress you may feel. The tourist, the business person or someone from the diplomatic corps not committed to being the incarnation of Christ in that culture, may feel little culture stress.

- **Values.** The greater the differences in values between your home culture and your host culture, the greater the stress. Values of cleanliness, responsibility, and use of time may cause stress for years. Cultures may appear similar on the surface but have broad differences in deeper values.

- **Communication.** Learning the meanings of words and rules of grammar are only a small part of being able to communicate effectively. The whole way of thinking, the common knowledge base, and the use of non-verbals are necessary and come only with great familiarity with the culture.

- **Temperament.** The greater the difference in your personality and the average personality in the culture, the greater the stress. A reserved person may find it difficult to feel at home where most people are outgoing extroverts. An extrovert may never feel at ease in a reserved culture.
• Entry-re-entry. Most missionaries, unlike immigrants, live in two cultures and may never feel fully at home in either. Every few years they change their place of residence, never fully adapting to the culture they are in at the time.

• Children. The more your children internalize the values of your host culture and the more you realize that they will be quite different from you, the more stress you may feel.

• Multinational teams. Although effectiveness of the ministry may increase, working together in your mission with people from cultures other than your host culture often adds to the culture stress.

Common results of cultural stress, which can be very similar to other types of stress:

• Feelings of anxiety, confusion, disorientation, uncertainty, insecurity, and helplessness

• Fatigue, tiredness, lack of motivation, lethargy, lack of joy

• Illness (stress suppresses the immune system), concern about germs, fear of what might be in the food

• Disappointment, lack of fulfillment, discouragement, feeling hurt, feeling inadequate, feeling "out of it"

• Anger, irritability, contempt for the host culture, resentment (perhaps toward God), feelings of superiority or inferiority

• Rejection of the host culture, the mission board, even of God.
• Homesickness

Suggestions on how to decrease culture stress and make it manageable:

• Recognition. Realize that culture stress is inevitable for those attempting to become at home in a host culture, and look at what factors cause you the most stress.

• Acceptance. Admit that the host culture is a valid way of life, a means of bringing Christ to the people who live in it.

• Communication. Beware of isolating yourself from everyone in your home culture, those with whom you can relax and be yourself, those with whom you can talk.

• Escape. You need daily, weekly, and annual respites. God made the Sabbath for people, so be sure you keep it. Reading, music, hikes, worship (not leading it), and vacations are necessary.

• Identity. Know who you are and what you will allow to be changed about you. Acculturation inherently involves changes in your personality, so determine the unchangeables.

• Activity. Since stress prepares you for fight or flight, and as a missionary you can probably do neither, you must have some physical activity to use that energy. Sports, an exercise plan, and active games with family or friends can reduce stress.
• Befriend a national family. Get close to a national family just for fun, not to learn or evangelize. Learn how to have fun in that culture.

Like any other type of stress, staying connected to God is one of the most critical factors. Realizing and accepting our personal limitations and God's sufficiency is so important. Regularly getting some special time away with your family and with the Lord is fundamental. Do not feel guilty taking the necessary time away to stay refreshed and strong in the Lord and in your significant relationships.

Application and Action Steps

1. Make prayer one of your highest priorities with your fellow missionaries. Every day is not too much, and might be necessary, especially in the beginning.

2. Stay humble and teachable, especially as a new missionary on the field. Study the blessings of humility, and also the consequences of pride in someone's life in the Bible.

3. Make sure you keep very short accounts with your family members and fellow missionaries. Realize that you may be just as difficult to live and work with as you may think others are.

4. As you embrace your new culture, practice some of the items listed above for overcoming culture stress.
Conclusion:

David and Svea Flood moved from the comforts of their home in Sweden to the heart of Africa with their 2-year old son. Svea died and David was crippled with alcoholism for the rest of his life. Was it worth their sacrifice? Now they are together in heaven with hundreds of African worshipers before our Lord Jesus Christ, many of whom were saved through their sacrifice of love. Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

Let the love of Christ control us as we together strive to fulfill Jesus’ Great Commission.
Great Commission Campaign
United for Europe 2014

Europe has been identified as one of the most strategic mission fields in the world today. Great Commission Europe has already established a broad presence in Europe, and is committed to further developing reproducible, indigenous churches throughout Europe.

However, Europe clearly remains a desperately needy mission field where Americans can generally adapt and assimilate into the cultures more easily than in other parts of the world. Europe also has the lowest percentage of evangelical Christians in the world (2%), with very minimal growth. Many countries in Europe have less than 1% evangelical Christians! Europe is also the gateway to the world, with millions of immigrants from all over the world, and more arriving daily.

Europe has historically exerted a major influence around the world, whether it be through the scientific revolution or missionary activity which has resulted in the incredible growth of Christianity in every other continent. But over the last century and a half, the spiritual condition of Europe has been decimated through the Enlightenment, higher criticism of the Bible and naturalism. This has left Europe increasingly in the grips of humanism and atheism. And make no mistake about it, Europe will continue to influence the rest of the world. This helps clarify why Europe currently presents such a critical mission field.

As fellow members of the Great Commission church movement, we all desire to affirm our commitment to Jesus’ great and final command. One goal of this campaign is to provide a coordinated effort between stateside churches and regions in order to open new European cities and countries to the gospel. The thought is to develop an intentional plan, with
proper preparation of teams of laborers, culminating in the year 2014 and beyond

Great Commission Europe has developed a list of focus countries where relationships European nationals have already been developed. While these countries are not the only areas of interest, they currently seem to be the most likely landing points for new works in new countries.

**GCE CURRENT LIST OF FOCUS COUNTRIES**
- ALBANIA
- FRANCE
- ROMANIA
- MALDOVA
- LATVIA
- SWEDEN

A brief description of the country specific needs and current status for these focus countries is provided on the following pages. If you have a specific interest in these countries, or other countries in Europe, we would recommend you continue to pray for God to clarify your vision through prayer, When appropriate, speak with your local pastor, and consider contacting Great Commission Europe. Contact information for GCE is provided at the end of this booklet.

If you want to know more about the Great Commission Campaign – United for Europe, please contact us through the Great Commission Europe website at [www.gceweb.org](http://www.gceweb.org).
ALBANIA
Population: 3.2 million
Religions: Muslim (62%)
Christian (30%)
[Evangelicals 0.5%]
Non-religious (7%)

Albania has undergone major changes in the last few years. It is now in a very critical stage of transition and is in desperate need of Christian workers. Here are some of the doors God has been opening to GCE:

- The Torino, Italy church (il rifugio) has a number of Albanians, and among them are several who have expressed an interest in returning to help strengthen and build the struggling church in Albania.
- Frank and Pam Apisa (Milan, Italy) went to Vlorë, Albania, for the wedding of an il rifugio church member, where they met a number of young Christians and Christian leaders. Since then, the Apisas have been praying for a team to plant a church in Albania.
- Paul Meiburger (Torino, Italy) has made preliminary contact with a Baptist missionary who has served in the capital of Albania, Tiranë, since 1992. He also made a trip to Vlorë and has a contact in Durrës.

The Need in Albania
• Christians with a heart to love people, share the gospel and plant churches.
• Leaders who are able to adapt, work cross-culturally and unite believers.
• Short-Term Mission Teams
FRANCE
Population: 62.6 million
Religions: Christian (61%)
[Evangelicals 1%]
Non-religious (26%)
Muslim (10%)

For many centuries, France has been an influential country in Europe and the world. The most strategic starting point for us in reaching this spiritually dark country seems to be Grenoble. Even though other parts of the country are even more unreached, God has given us an open door in this city.

A young couple who met each other while studying in Torino (and meeting with il rifugio) married and moved to France two years ago. They have already started a small home fellowship of three or four families, and are eager for help. They are excited about the proposal of an STM coming to offer English Clubs on the university campus.

Another factor that makes Grenoble such an open door is its proximity to our Italian churches. Torino is only a few hours away, and our churches in Italy have mature leaders who can offer substantial help. Our desire would be to see an initial French work established in Grenoble, which in time would send teams to the more unreached areas of France.

The Need in France
• Workers (especially French speakers!)
• Short-Term Mission Teams
• Permanent workers 2012-2014
ROMANIA

Population - 21.2 million
Religions - Christian (96.9%)
[Evangelicals 5.4%]
Non-religious (2.4%)

Romania is a country that God continues to place on our hearts, and He is opening up doors of opportunity. Here are several such connections:

- A brother from the GCC church in Salt Lake City, Utah, has a burden for Romania and senses that God may want him to move there.

- A young missionary couple with relationships to GCC has been living and serving in Breaza, Romania (near Campina) for several years. They are both fluent in the language, and are currently involved in leading Christian camps for young people, but have expressed an increasing interest in church planting, mentioning Iasi as a possible location.

- Iasi is a city with a large student population (most of whom speak English), and could be an excellent starting place.

- Il rifugio in Torino, Italy, has about 10 people in their congregation from the city of Iasi, and they sent an exploratory team there a few years ago.

The Need in Romania
- Laborers who can share their faith, learn a language and work in a team!
- Leaders who are able to adapt, work cross-culturally and unite believers.
- Short-Term Mission Teams
Two years ago, Stas Boronets (Chisinau, Moldova) discovered the Simple Church Europe website, and he contacted Timmy Powers to ask for help in reaching his country with the gospel. Currently, Stas has regular coaching appointments with Timmy, he attends events held in Ukraine, and Timmy has conducted conferences for them in Moldova. Stas and his team have been involved in training leaders and planting churches in several cities over the past two years. In God’s providence, there have been other connections developing with GCC. Since 2009, River Ridge Church of Charleston, West Virginia, has sent teams each summer to labor with Stas and his team. Sam Caldwell (a part of that church) served in Moldova for a number of years. Mike Bergen and Lee’s Summit Community Church (Missouri) have also established contact with Stas, initially prompted by a member of their church who has been involved with orphan ministry in Chisinau. We have already developed a significant ministry connection in Moldova, and believe that with additional laborers we can strengthen our partnership and advance the gospel more rapidly.

**The Need in Moldova**

- Looking for leaders who can be catalytic and who can coach and develop nationals to be disciplermakers and church planters. The focus will primarily be on developing a network of simple churches.
- Short-Term Mission Teams
LATVIA

Population: 2.24 million
Religions: Christian (60%)
[Evangelicals 7%]
Non-religious (38%)
Muslim (0.4%)

In the spring of 2010, Timmy Powers (Kiev, Ukraine) made connection with Andris Dekants, and they quickly formed a strong friendship. During the summer, Andris spent two weeks in Ukraine laboring with the Kiev team and the relationship with him further developed. Steve Nelson and Timmy both contact him on a regular basis, with Timmy more specifically coaching him in ministry. He is very active in the gospel, is discipling a few people, and has recently started a small gathering in an apartment. Andris really has a burden for his country, which is religious (primarily nominal Lutherans), but spiritually dead. He really resonates with the truth we have been sharing with him, and desires to continue in partnership with us.

We would like to conduct a conference in Latvia this year and from there, hope to further establish the connections that we have been developing.

The Need in Latvia
• Looking for leaders who can be catalytic and who can coach and develop nationals to be disciplermakers and church planters. The focus will primarily be on developing a network of simple churches.
• Short-Term Mission Teams
SWEDEN

Population - 9.3 million
Religions - Christian (57.2%)
[Evangelicals 6.9%]
Non-religious (38.4%)
Muslim (3.6%)

For the past two years, Riverbend Church, Columbia, SC, has had a strategic partnership with two national church groups in Luleå (rhymes with “Julio”), Sweden, the Evangelical Free Church of Sweden and the Pentecostal Church of Sweden. We have sent several short-term trips, one from Rock Berlin (Germany), for evangelism and training and have assisted them with a church planting conference.

We have exchanged staff and invited seven of the Swedish students who are leading the campus ministry in Luleå to spend 10 weeks in South Carolina as part of our GCSE LINC leadership training.

Our goal over the next three years is to continue to build the partnership by helping facilitate the establishment of a leadership pipeline on the college campus in Luleå and to see churches planted in the northern Barents region of Scandinavia and Russia.

Our desire is to continue to connect GCE churches to this partnership.

The Need in Sweden
- Workers who can share the gospel and make disciples!
- Short-Term Mission Teams
Helpful Resources and Websites

Great Commission Europe website  www.gceweb.org

Great Commission Churches website  www.gccweb.org

Great Commission Ministries website  www.gcmweb.org

Great Commission Ministries has also developed a very nice guide for their long-term overseas missionaries entitled Long-Term Missions Resource Manual. This can be obtained by contacting Joe Dunn at joe.dunn@gcmweb.org.

Great Commission Ministries also has a very helpful In-Church Missions Mentoring Manual to help churches better equip its members for foreign missions, including evaluation tests. This can be obtained by contacting Mark Groff at missions@gcmweb.org or mark.groff@gcmweb.org

Mission Training International website  www.mti.org

Missionary Care website  www.missionarycare.org


2 “Draw Me Close to You” words and music by Australia Hillsongs

3 The Core, Beliefs and Common Practices of the Great Commission Churches, 2006