

# *IMTN A conversation of trainers that leads to action*

Bulletin 2

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## Introduction

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We were pleased by the response to the first IMTN bulletin on Equipping the Whole Person. Conversations have been sparked that can continue as we seek to enable one another to develop training that challenges and transforms thinking, attitudes and relationships.

In this second IMTN bulletin we take up another critical issue for cross cultural mission namely, the issue of resilience and sustainability of cross cultural workers for long term service. Attrition in the mission workforce is a huge challenge in the older sending countries as well as for those more recently sending out workers. Those concerned with the sending out of missionaries need to understand training as a key aspect of caring for the missionaries and a way of enabling long term service. We need to develop an understanding of missionary training as vital member care.

Dr.Felipe JinSuk Byun is director of the Global Missionary Training Center (GMTC) in Korea. In this bulletin he shares insights from GMTC's 29 years experience of mission training.

## Missionary Training as Member Care – The Korean Case

Felipe Jinsuk Byun PhD

As an emerging missionary movement, the Korean Church did not so much care for its missionaries as it did for the numbers that were sent out and their achievements. The missionary movement in Korea that began in the 1980s has now entered its stages of maturity. This means that the first generation of missionaries are about to end their ministries. So Korean mission is today observing the full life cycle of a missionary—preparation, selection, sending, field ministry, home assignment, resending, retiring from field ministry, and reentry. At the point in which it has completed this first full cycle of missionary life, we find it necessary to rethink Korean mission from the perspective of missionary member care. As we do so, we will be able to contribute helpful ideas and concepts for the missionary movement in the coming generation.

### **Korean Mission from the Perspective of Member Care**

Due to its relatively short history, Korean mission agencies, both the denominational and interdenominational, had only a few full-fledged retired missionaries who had

served on the mission field for a designated period of time. We watched with admiration and perhaps a certain amount of envy as veteran missionary couples like the Gardners visited Korea some years ago to give seminars on missionary member care. For over fifty years, Dick and Larrie engaged in Bible translation work in Mexico as members of Wycliffe Bible Translators, in the aftermath of which they have continued to serve the same organization in another capacity in order to establish a member care system. I personally felt that this was possible not only because of their faithful dedication, but also because their agency had a system in place that cares for the entirety of the missionary's life cycle. From this perspective, I believe that the Korean mission should develop a comprehensive member care system, and it also must be proactive, not reactive, in its problem-solving. In many aspects, missionary training plays an essential role in cultivating and practicing a member care system.

In the next section, I will assess the effect of missionary training on member care in the light of the 29 years of training ministry undertaken by the Global Missionary Training Center (GMTC) in Korea.

### **The Meaning of Missionary Training from the Member Care Perspective**

The 1997 study, *'Too Valuable to Lose'* was an effort by the Mission Commission of the WEA to illuminate the causes of early attrition among missionaries. It emphasized that missionary training is the most comprehensive and lasting preventive measure for the care of missionary personnel.<sup>1</sup> In this context, missionary training does not constitute purely textbook-centered academic studies of missiology, or drilling a few cross-cultural adaptation skills, but rather an integral missionary training, encompassing the whole life of a missionary including their children.

Summarized below are four aspects of the relationship between missionary training and member care.

#### **1) Missionary training can enhance the missionary's ability for self and mutual care.**

An appropriate missionary training program will enable missionaries to possess self-care skills by enhancing comprehensive personal management skills. It includes all the aspects of personal life, such as the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional and social aspects. Such personal management concepts are engraved through missionary training, and missionaries are encouraged to keep them in mind throughout the whole of their lives. It is very important to think of one's self management and development in a place where there is no outside support and care. Kelly O'Donnell considered this aspect to be the "backbone."<sup>2</sup> Compared to missionaries who belong to Western mission agencies with their long history and traditions, it is far more important for Korean missionaries to have the ability for self and mutual care, due to the fact that the Korean mission currently has a weak field

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<sup>1</sup> William D. Taylor ed., *Too Valuable to Lose* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Kelly O'Donnell, *Doing Member Care Well* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2002), 17.

system, if it has such a system at all.

In fostering this ability, we have found it effective to have our trainees live in a community of colleagues, and find ways to learn from each other. Though they are living in Korea, they are faced with a variety of people from different denominational backgrounds, professional backgrounds (clergy and laypersons), age differences (some young and others old), and different family formats (singles and couples). By mingling together for several months, relating closely as next door neighbors, they come to experience the message of Hebrews 10:24, “let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” and they themselves become the stimuli to each other for transformation. These trainees not only improve self-management skills, but also come to know what it means to receive help from others.

At the same time, they learn how to become caregivers through training. Therefore, I would hold that missionary training lays a strong foundation for member care and allows the trained members to assume the important role of building a strong and suitable member care system, both for themselves and for others on the field.

## **2) Missionary training can strengthen ties with the constituency of the member care.**

Missionaries should not do their ministry independently or make decisions as they please. They ought to think of themselves as representatives of the church under the great commission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through missionary training they also become aware of the importance of being related to a reliable mission agency for their care and support. Having a relationship with a dependable mission agency is to establish a lifelong relationship with the constituency of member care. Such awareness of having a right relationship with the member care community is not only important for the well-being of the missionaries, but also enables them to remain on the mission field longer. If they have strong ties with many supporting churches, and have appropriate directions from their mission agency, they find themselves secure in a care network. These missionaries will have confidence to break through hard circumstances or emergencies that might otherwise be difficult to solve.

In the Apostle Paul’s case, he not only cared for the churches he established, but shared his own burdens with them and received their support as well (Phil. 4:10-20, Rom. 15:22-33). Through missionary training, the trainees ought to study and come to understand theologically what the relationship between God’s mission and the local churches is, and how local churches and mission agencies have worked together in mission history. In light of that understanding, they need to come to terms with their own stance in the mission. Therefore, missionaries should know to whom they are responsible and to whom they should rely on for their member care needs. The fact that regular prayer letters and ministry reports will strengthen their tie with the supporting community needs to be emphasized through missionary training.

## **3) Missionary Training can connect people to a wider circle of member care network.**

An important role of missionary training is to raise awareness of the fact that the

missionary movement is a world-wide effort, and not just the lone project of Korean missionaries and Korean churches. Presently, in almost all countries, there are local churches and national leaders, and many leaders from various countries are working together on the field. Once students who have gained a wider perspective of the missionary movement are sent out to their designated field as missionaries, they will be able to connect themselves with the international community of member-care network and be able to receive support from them.

From the beginning of its ministry, GMTC has endeavored to raise awareness of the international missions' community to the trainee while being closely related to the mission commission of WEA, and has attempted to familiarize its members with major missiological trends. It has also invited many renowned international mission leaders to expose the trainees to current global missionary leadership; thus they are provided with the latest information of what is taking place in the international scene. Such opportunities have enabled them to enlarge their vision and appropriate whatever help that is available from the worldwide member care system and experts.

**4) Missionary training will help set one's ministry direction by allowing him or her to cultivate a philosophy of ministry.**

A philosophy of ministry will make a world of difference for an individual who has it compared to one who does not. If missionary training can help missionary candidates draw a big picture that is finely tuned and goal-oriented, it can help build a solid foundation of member care by providing the most important guide for his or her life.

GMTC stresses to its trainees that this type of training is embedded in the curriculum they take part in. In other words, GMTC sets a program that encourages the trainees to possess certain traits by the time they complete it in its entirety, and it is with this vision that it administers the whole training process. Trainees are challenged to build and appropriate a biblical worldview in all parts of their lives, and to make it a life-long task to build this in as an internal trait. They are also guided to draw up their own philosophy of ministry and their vision statement according to their own gifts and talents as they go through the training. To achieve such goals, GMTC utilizes formal, informal and non-formal educational formats. Even the location of the training center contributes to its philosophy of training as a hidden curriculum.<sup>3</sup> The office management staff, the children's school teachers, as well as the tutors strive to lead by example in order to maximize the effects of training.

**Conclusion**

According to Larrie Gardner, missionary training is the most direct and positive member care for prospective missionaries, and it should thus be carried out by the way of fulfilling member care. In this piece, I have attempted to shed light on the meaning of GMTC training based on this concept. GMTC's vision is to raise

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<sup>3</sup> The property of GMTC, including its students' dorm, is located in the middle of a regular housing area. We believe that missionary life should be carried out in a surrounding of everyday, ordinary life, since it is only in this way that the missionary can interact fully with the local people.

missionary leaders who will become influential figures in the Korean missionary movement. For the last 29 years of ministry, GMTTC has been fulfilling this goal as it strived to provide member care for its students. I believe that this has been possible because it accommodated the friendly care of the whole person in their environment, and had concern for the individual missionary's family life as well as his or her personal development.