

How to Choose a Mission Agency

The journey from sensing the Lord's call to mission to fruitful ministry among an unreached people group involves many prayerful steps. A crucial decision concerns the choice of the right mission agency to partner with you. This document tries to give suggestions to help you begin to answer the following two questions:

- **why join a mission agency?**
- **which one is right for you?**

Why join a mission agency?

In these days of instant communication and affordable world travel, you may feel that a mission agency is no longer necessary. Here are a few reasons why today's pioneering mission workers are discovering the value of belonging to an agency.

Pre-field mentoring

An experienced agency can help you with these questions:

- How do I prepare spiritually?
- How will my family adapt to the culture?
- What language training do I require?
- What visa applications do I need to submit?
- How will my children be educated?
- How will my gifts be best used in the ministry context of this people group?

Most agencies require new members to undergo pre-field training, ranging from a few intense weeks to several months. Agencies provide in-depth training in culture and language, spiritual discipleship and proven evangelistic methods. They will convey a clear understanding of the spiritual, political and social climate on the field and connect you with in-country teams.

Church relationships

Your sending church will have many questions arising from their pastoral concern for you and your family. Partnering with a mission agency will help to address issues of ongoing care and ministry support, in-field training, security, secure communication, and advice on direct church involvement. An agency helps to shoulder the burden of responsibility for a church worker's safety, health and supervision in ministry. They provide advice through the wise placement of workers, expertise on the field, and contacts in the host country.

Team relationships on the field

Your personal call is important, but you cannot fulfil your mission alone. A mission agency will help you identify and fit into the right team who share your vision. A team can model Christian community to unreached peoples, especially an international team. The combined strengths of a team far outweigh the sum of its parts – your colleagues can offset your weaknesses and provide continuity, should members have to leave.

Your team can keep you accountable and focussed on your goals. Team members share your ethos of mission and can encourage and pray with you in the hard times. A team can provide invaluable fellowship and support. Should team tensions arise, the agency can provide council and insight.

Prayer support

A mission agency will partner with you in prayer and help you to organise prayer support. Most agencies already have a network of prayer supporters who will pray for you in your ministry.

Practical support

Mission agencies have experienced home office staff who can take care of issues like travel arrangements, visas, money transfers and other financial matters, insurance, pension and help with prayer letters. Home office staff free you up for ministry.

In the event of a personal crisis or a imminent threat, mission leaders on the field provide a quick response. They keep up to date on your situation and will inform those who need to know.

How do I choose a mission agency?

There are a wide variety of mission agencies in the UK – some have a broad vision for the unreached while others are more specialised. Before making a commitment, develop a relationship with them. It is easier to grow together if you share a common calling, beliefs and values, have complementary gifts and have a clear understanding of ministry styles.

Here are some areas you might want to explore.

Calling

What has God called me to?

Are you called to a particular people group, a specific nation or ministry within your profession? A close relationship with the mission's representatives will allow you to discern whether you have a shared calling. Do they have expertise and presence in my area of interest? Talk to workers with experience and ask them how God called them and how the agency is enabling them to fulfill their calling.

Statement of Faith

Do I agree with their statement of faith?

You must be able to fully embrace the doctrinal and values statements of the mission agency. This is foundational to any long-term relationship and will avoid frustrations later. Be open with your agency about theological issues and consider formal theological training so that you can study Scripture, church history and gospel essentials.

Core values

What values shape the mission agency?

Organisations are shaped by their vision and values. Each one has a unique personality, which God uses in His global plan. Beliefs are the foundation of any organization and core values determine how they build on that foundation.

Our personal values can emerge when they are contradicted or threatened. As you think through yours, ask what values the agency holds relative to:

- structures (how does the agency value team, individuality, hierarchy, membership?)
- methodology (is the agency relationship or programme driven?)

- goals (is the agency focused on numerical measurements or individual goals?)
- leadership (what is the agency's attitude towards role of women, ethnic or racial diversity?)
- management style (do leaders emphasize close supervision, autonomy, relational or task?)

You can reduce future tension by choosing an agency that shares the same values as you. In the process, allow God to shape your values to ensure that they are godly and not simply inherited.

Gifts

How has God shaped me for ministry?

It is vital that you are able to fulfill your ministry calling in accordance with the unique way God has shaped you. You may have to adapt your ministry style, but the agency should acknowledge and appreciate your gifts and have a place in their team structure for the effective use of those gifts.

What qualities and qualifications am I expected to have as a new member?

Does the ministry provide or require special training? It is wise to discover early on whether you meet these requirements or what will be expected to achieve the required level.

You may wish to discover how flexible the agency is in developing ministry roles and how it values learning and personal and professional development. You can discover this by asking those who have served for some time about their changing role.

Expectations of care

How will I be cared for by the mission?

No agency can provide for all of your family's needs. But, you should gain a clear understanding of the level of care and support offered by the agency. Areas that you may wish to cover include:

- **Training.** What can I expect for orientation and on-going professional development?
- **Personal Support.** What level of funding should I raise and how will the agency help me? Obtain a clear statement on budgets and the use of funds.
- **Field supervision.** What level of oversight will I require/experience in relation to ministry, pastoral care, and administration? What are my expectations for team relationships, reporting procedures and conflict or crisis intervention plans and policies?
- **Home assignments.** How long will I spend at home and what proportion of this time will be used for fund-raising, training, rest, spiritual restoration and a visit to the agency office?
- **Pension.** What pension provisions will be made through the agency or do I make my own?
- **Debriefing/re-entry.** What about sabbaticals, retirement or end of employment?

Clear communication about expectations at the outset will reduce disappointment in the field.

Church relationships

How closely is this agency linked with my local church?

Your pastor can tell you which agencies have a connection with your church. An agency that is already linked with your church is likely to have a similar theology and view of ministry. This will help you as you build your support base.

The mission agency

Some other questions about the mission agency itself:

- Impact

Does the mission agency have a meaningful impact for the glory of God?

What impact has the mission agency had on the field? Has the work grown, especially in the last two years? Even though work is slow in some countries, an agency should be able to show fruit.

- Growth

Is the mission agency adding to the number of workers in the field?

A small agency has the advantage of a family atmosphere, while a large one offers a more sophisticated organization. Whether large or small, a dynamic mission agency should expect to grow as they share their vision and fulfill God's purposes among unreached people groups.

- Origins

How and when did the agency begin?

This may not seem relevant, but agencies often carry the legacy of their founding members, which should be a powerful motivation to today's generation of workers.

- Reputation

What kind of reputation does the agency have in the wider church?

Ask around to gain a sense of the agency's standing in the wider church. All organisations have their detractors, but the agency you choose should be well respected within the UK Church.

- Turnover

How many years does the average worker stay with the agency?

Ask about why workers leave the organisation. What happens to those who do leave – do they go on to further ministry for the Lord?

- Finances

Is the agency's financial policy sound? Is it open to the public?

Is there a network of supporters solidly behind the agency? How much of my personal support will go toward the agency's overhead?

You may find the above to be of help as you begin your journey with a mission agency – **but please do not get lost in the detail of choosing an organisation.** Find an agency that you "click" with - one that resonates with your thinking, your passions and your dreams.

If God has clearly led you to go overseas as a missionary, then also trust Him to lead you to the right mission agency. God will show you where you are to serve Him.



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