

Advice to Groups Giving Money to East African Church Workers

(Last Revision: 11 October 2003)

My advice to any group already caught in the dilemma of giving regular support money to indigenous workers for the advancement of the church in East Africa includes at least the following:

1. Put a freeze on supporting any new activities until you have clearly formulated long term goals & well thought out philosophy of ministry methods, as well as proper procedures to reliably measure ministry progress & insure financial accountability.
2. Before setting your goals, methods & procedures educate yourselves on the issues. Even if you do not agree with the conclusions of long-term missionaries who advocate a restrained use of outside funds, you still need to at least gain an understanding of the major issues involved: cross-cultural communication problems, differing cultural values, history of aid used in developing countries, Biblical & missiological church planting methods, etc. To this end, some recommended resources include:
 - A. "Ministering Cross-Culturally" by Sherwood Lingenfelter & Marvin Mayers – Provides numerous insights & important things to consider before working in a different culture.
 - B. "The Africans" by David Lamb – Dated but still excellent survey of African politics & society, including perceptive analysis of Africa's problems, challenges & potential.
 - C. "The Road to Hell" by Michael Maren – Long-time secular aid worker gives a sobering account of the effects of western aid upon Africa, & shows good intentions are not enough.
 - D. "African Friends & Money Matters" by David Marantz – Does a thorough job of highlighting the significant differences between the way westerners & Africans view & handle money.
 - E. "Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?" by Roland Allen – The classic text examining modern missions activity in light of relevant passages of Scripture.
 - F. "Planting & Development of Missionary Churches" by John L. Nevius – The pioneer missiological book advocating the importance of planting "3 Self" churches.
 - G. "African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective" by Richard J. Gehman – Terrific comprehensive introduction to African folk religion in comparison with Scriptural truth.
 - H. World Missions Associates' web site: www.wmausa.org – Offers a host of articles concerning the problem of dependency in missions.
3. If after studying the issues you still believe financially supporting nationals is Biblical & the most effective way to build the indigenous church, then at least set up guidelines for criteria about who you will support, for how much, & for how long. Some suggestions are:
 - A. Before agreeing to support an indigenous worker in a new field, first solicit counsel from any evangelical missionaries already serving on the ground to avoid disrupting existing ministries.
 - B. Do not approve a new work until passing through proper national denominational channels, & securing written approval from appropriate governing bodies within the indigenous church.
 - C. Do not entrust funds to anyone unless that person has successfully completed an application process in which background, qualifications & references are checked.
 - D. Insure any support given is commensurate with the average salary received by other nationals with similar educational qualifications & doing similar work in the local area.
 - E. Stipulate any support provided will be less than 100% of the indigenous worker's salary, & require the national or local church to provide the balance with verification.
 - F. Achieve mutual understanding & agreement that support given will be on a declining scale with a definite & expeditious ending date.
 - G. Require proper accountability to both the indigenous church & the outside supporting group, including detailed financial accounting & accurate ministry reports given on a regular basis.
4. After agreeing on your guidelines, closely examine every ministry you are already supporting to make sure those ministries also meet the new criteria. If they do not, then formulate a feasible transition plan & timetable to bring each ministry into conformity with your guidelines.

Of course, it is true that ministry philosophy & methods may differ among mission groups, plus the guidelines cited above may be foreign to the indigenous church being supported. Still my experience indicates any approach using outside funding to pay pastors salaries & construct church buildings in poor rural East African locations will not ultimately yield a spiritually vigorous & sustainable church. However, whatever we may believe about these things, as one Body of Christ, we should all seek to work out our differences together before moving ahead to do our own thing.