

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Warmest greetings in the wonderful name of Jesus. We trust this letter finds you all well, expectant about the new year before us, and content and joyful in your place of service.

From time to time we send out a letter to the MTW community about a theme the Senior Team, field leadership, and some of our missionaries have been discussing related to our work around the globe. This letter is one of those and as always we invite comments, critique, and suggestions from you about how to better care for our field folks.

At a recent Senior Strategy Team meeting (comprised of Lloyd, Bill Goodman, the International Directors, and advisers Amy Newsome and Holly Eastman) we talked about specific ways we could continue to encourage our MTW family to put down deep and lasting roots in their host countries especially in light of the growing availability of international travel and impact of social media on local learning and living. As we are all aware, the abundance of international ticketing options and the ubiquitous presence of social media brings to all of us the temptation to take our eyes off local realities and can impact the cultivation of local relationships, local church planting, church renewal, and local mercy initiatives. Other challenges, especially for our newer missionaries, include missing extended time and focus on language learning and cultural adjustment. And, for some us older types, prolonged absences could touch on the message we may (or may not?) be communicating about our commitment to local leadership and local team dynamics with our international colleagues and partners. The trend we're noticing toward shorter HMA cycles, increasingly frequent trips by some of our missionaries to the U.S. for personal matters, and even our necessary absences due to tax totalization laws leads us to invite you to have a prayerful look, if you haven't done so already, at how you and your team are working in each of these areas. We realize that our field family is a very mixed bag and that a one-size/theme doesn't fit all. However, we want you, as field leadership, to explore with your colleagues the multifaceted aspects of field absences, HMA cycles, language/cultural learning, and local ministry connections as they may be affecting you and your team.

Some practical areas for discussion. With respect to HMAs, our policy grid simply states, "in consensus with the International Director (ID) recommend the HMA schedule as well as the responsibilities of the missionary during HMA." HMAs are challenging at many levels, but we want our leadership to explore with teammates the best fit - shorter?, longer?, etc. - for each missionary in light of language learning and cultural adjustments and for all of us to feel empowered to say the gracious "no" to supporting churches that insist that a missionary come from overseas to attend their conferences when that could interfere with important local learning and labors. Additionally, we know that in some cases, a short HMA cycle may be the best fit given financial support levels and visa and tax totalization considerations. However, what has been happening is that shorter HMA cycles have led to less-than-full financial support being raised, to seeing MKs who never fully experience a longer time in the U.S. (making their final transition to college more difficult), and relationships in the States with current and potential supporters more shallow as visits to supporting churches/individuals are packed into a short window of time shared with visits to family and friends. In light of these considerations, a year-long HMA often makes more sense, despite the added logistical complications. Please have a

prayerful look with your team about the HMA cycles in your area and help us all to discover better and more practical ways to serve our colleagues and partners at home and abroad.

Another practical concern has been the temptation for some of our newer missionaries to not fully engage in language learning and/or deep cultural investment during the beginning of their service. As a team, we'd like to note several things that have come up in recent discussions. One is that an extended period of language learning should not be *optional* or *preferred*. We've all seen that our missionaries that have thrived on the field have made language learning their *priority* and have, at least on the front end, avoided getting involved in English Bible studies, leading/attending English services, and serving in other English-only activities. Secondly, we noted that trips to the States during one's first two years of ministry on the field should be *extremely rare*. We all know and understand that frequent absences slow acculturation significantly. And thirdly, because we care for our families and the relational cost involved in frequent travel and absences, we ask that spouses not be separated by travel for more than three weeks at a time. Exceptions, and there may be valid reasons for them, should go through both regional leadership and the ID for review. Again, these are areas for discussion and we welcome feedback and insights that will help us all.

Our prayer is that you would receive this letter as an encouragement to invest deeply in the unique context to which the Lord of the Harvest has called you and your team. The letter is also an invitation to discuss these themes with field leadership and/or your ID. Additionally, as appropriate and possible, it would be the better part of wisdom to discuss our travel and absences with our international colleagues and partners. In many cases their input and perspective would be invaluable. All of us desire our missionaries to experience emotional, spiritual, and contextual health, to thrive in context, to excel at learning the heart languages of those they serve, and to experience deep and transformative local relationships. We are in this together and would invite you to communicate with your field leadership or ID if you have ideas or questions about this communication.

Gratefully in the gospel,

The Senior Strategy Team