

THE LATIN AMERICAN MISSIONARY AND THE OBSTACLE OF THE DEPENDENCY MENTALITY

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The Problem

Since the reception of Latin American missionaries by national churches of the world is still relatively new for the majority, Latin American missionaries observe that frequently there is expectancy on the part of the receiving national church that the missionary is a source of resources. This negatively impacts the work of the Latin American missionary who often does not have access to many resources.

This is not a new problem. The document "Guidelines for Missionary Relationships" that was drafted in 1994 states:

THE RECEIVING CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE MISSIONARY

- **Recognize both North American and Latin American missionaries under the same conditions, regardless of the missionary's origin there should be no economic expectations, rather missionaries should be received as God's ministers not as "sources of material goods."**
- Communicate to the missionary and his family unique cultural values and church polities.
- Receive the missionary and formally present him/her to the appropriate authorities.
- Allow the missionary freedom to work in the agreed upon areas of service.
- Provide the missionary with the needed documentation for immigration and residency.
- Inform the missionary of any accusation which may require ministerial discipline.

Although this reference was written when there were still very few missionaries in the field (the majority were serving in Latin American countries), today this reality is experienced in many countries around the world.

Cognizant of this reality, the following affirmations are presented:

1. The Golden Rule of the National Churches: “Just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.” Luke 6:31 How you expect your national church be treated, treat other national churches in the same way. The national churches that are today receiving churches should treat the missionary that they receive with respect because one day they also will be a sending church. (Let us not forget that this rule applies to the nations of Latin America as well. “Independent” missionaries who are not under the authority of the national church should not be sent, just as it is expected of missionaries who are sent to serve a national church in Latin America.)
2. Latin American missionaries must have patience with the receiving churches because what is occurring today is what happened in the past with missionaries who were received in Latin America (i.e. in the past in some Latin American countries foreign missionaries were accepted because of the resources they provided and not because of their ministries. Now the same thing is occurring with Latin American missionaries.
3. A missionary is a missionary, not due to access to economic resources, but because of a divine call and a ministry realized in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of a missionary’s origin, the gospel is the same, the Caller is the same, the Empowerer is the same, and the cost is the same – complete surrender (will, family, culture etc.)
4. National churches should introduce the missionaries in public contexts so that the members of the national church can get to know the missionary and his/her ministry. This makes the church aware that the missionary is a ministry and not just a source of resources.
5. The church that is planted on the mission field should be a missionary church from the beginning. It is much easier to shape a missionary church if missiological formation takes place from the moment of the church’s inception. Starting with the very first member it must be emphasized that the Church of Jesus Christ is a church with missionary vision and commitment. A positive consequence of this focus is the avoidance of the poverty mentality and dependence. This will also assist in avoiding a historical problem that occurred in Latin America and elsewhere, the problem of churches without missionary vision and commitment.

The following conclusion that comes from the document “Guidelines for Missionary Relationships” is still the answer to the obstacle of the dependency mentality on the mission field:

In all these relationships one must respect the lines of authority and service, respecting each person and their abilities, gifts and call in order to have a united church, all under the authority and unity of the body of Christ and the divine love that unites the church.