



May 22, 2015

Colleagues in Mission:

A warm and heartfelt greeting from Louisville! I hope and pray this email finds each of you well. I want you to know that you are in the center of my prayers over the past few months as we have been communicating with you. I have also received notes of encouragement and prayers from many of you, and I can't tell you how much that means to me. The bonds of Christian family are strong in this team, and I am so grateful to be a part of it.

I know that we have sent out a number of messages over the past month with some challenging news. Together with some colleagues here and some mission co-workers, we decided to think positively and proactively about the challenges we are facing. Over the past few weeks, I have sent out a request to a number of mission co-workers asking them for their top 3-5 tips, strategies, or ideas for how to most faithfully engage with US congregations and individuals. The responses have been overwhelmingly positive and when I get these emails from our mission co-workers, it has really been a bright spot in my day.

Pasted below and also posted on the quiet site, I present to you: [*77 ways to engage and invite participation in God's mission as a Presbyterian mission co-worker.*](#)

This is a list compiled straight from suggestions sent to me by your fellow mission co-workers. It is long, so go grab a cup of coffee, pop some popcorn (or whatever is the appropriate snack food in your locale) and dig in. Or read a few at a time and then come back later, whatever works best for you.

You will notice some repetition in the list. I really just cut and pasted the ideas and sorted them in to broad categories, so the repetition represents repeated ideas shared with me by the mission co-workers.

Here is what I am hoping, that this list will inspire you with new ideas for how to engage with US constituencies, affirm some of the ideas that you are already doing, and give you some proactive ways to connect more deeply with US congregations and individuals. This is not a "to-do" list, but instead is a hopeful list of suggestions and ideas generated by your colleagues to be shared as "best practices."

I know that not everything on this list will work for every person, that is not the point of a list like this. I also recognize that these things will take time. We communicated that at least 10% of each mission co-workers' time can be focused on engaging with US constituencies. If you have questions about that, either the time commitment or the impact on your partner, feel free to email me back or talk to your RL or Area Coordinator.



I would also love to hear your creative ideas if you don't see them represented on this list. Tell me about ways that you have successfully engaged with congregations and individuals, and we will add those to the list!

Thank you for your commitment to our partners and God's mission in the world. I truly consider my work with all of you as a great blessing in my life.

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Theological Grounding and our call to serve the US church

1. As one commissioned by the body of Christ for missionary service, explain your ministry in terms of your direct relationship with the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the lost. Consider yourself as the commissioned hands of the body of Christ to reach out and touch those with the greatest need in the world on behalf of the congregations of the PC(USA). Relational terms such as visiting, listening, touching, holding, and praying with and for the people you serve are important descriptors to use in your work of communicating God's mission to congregations. Congregations long to be spiritually connected to the needs of the world through you in direct, tangible ways.

2. Talk about a transformational Jesus Christ.

3. Our belief is that our calling is as much to the US as to our global church partner in our country of service. This makes communication with US churches a large part of our work.



4. Fund raising should not be looked at as fund raising. It should be looked at as telling the story of the global church or building a bridge among our partner churches. Generosity and support of MCWs should be emphasized as a primary means of ministering to the church in the US and connecting to the needs of the world. This too is part of the MCW's calling.

5. Focus on the spiritual relationship you share with congregations. Consider this relationship as a sacred missionary calling to build up and edify the body of Christ, of which PC(USA) congregations are a part. Convey to the congregations the sacredness of the relationship you share with them and how this empowers you to serve as a missionary of the church. Authenticity in your communications in this regard requires keeping Christ and his kingdom at the center of your communications about your work, all the while trusting that God, working through the body of Christ, will give you everything you need to carry out what God has called you to do.

Build Authentic, Deep and long-term relationships with churches and individuals

6. Develop real, long-term relationships with people and congregations who get to know you over a long time and over multiple visits and interactions. Keep up and deepen these real relationships, and gradually your excitement and conviction about your ministry will shine through. Where there are real relationships and trust, you can inform people and anticipate great results. They know you are missionaries and, during visits, they will normally ask how they can support you. The support happens organically as part of the relationship. Often it has taken multiple visits and interactions with congregations or individuals before the financial support begins.

7. Be open & honest about challenges faced in work, life, & ministry. This doesn't mean sharing every personal detail or putting the partner in a bad light, but it does mean helping supporters understand challenges and inviting them to pray with you. Being open helps supporters feel connected.

8. My supporters, both churches and individuals, are relationships which I have nurtured over time. Some are newer relationships (I visited a church last year on interpretation where I just had lunch with two of the pastors and shared my ministry. They became a supporting church this year.) Others are seminary or college classmates (my college roommate and his wife give \$5,000 a year through their small New England church), from former churches I have served, former church members, friends, pastors with whom I was in a preaching group whose churches support me, individuals who have visited my country over the years who want to be part of this mission, etc.. WM's idea of having individuals support mission co-workers, as well as churches, has been a good one!

9. Remind supporters that the accomplishments that we share about in our newsletters/talks /emails are the result of a 3 way partnership: us, them, & the partner church. The things we share about would not happen without their prayers & support.

10. Churches want to know they are making a difference and that God is using them as they



partner with MCWs. So it is really incumbent upon us to communicate, creatively and often.

11. Besides sending our mass newsletters, we always sent emails (initial contacts, thank yous, responses to birthdays etc.) to people *individually* and in addition we made sure to *personalize the communication* by including at least one sentence unique to that congregation or individual. People do not feel connected when receiving a form email or letter. *The emphasis of the relationship needs to be between the congregation and the missionary.*

12. Like all of us, we pray and trust that God will provide. Even when some congregations have indicated that they will no longer support, we keep sending them our prayer letters...to keep the relationship.

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!

13. In January each year, write a personal thank you letter to each contributor during the previous year, whether the contribution was for your salary support or for support of a program to which you are related. For churches, address the letter to the Session. The letters to churches may be typed, but state the name of the church in the salutation. Additional personal thank you letters throughout the year are great, but write at least one by the end of January.

14. Thank yous: We try to write handwritten thank you cards, we try to include a thank you line in every connections letter (and we listen well to Michelle Lori when we forget), and if we are not in a place where I can write a lot of cards right away, I try to find email addresses and send a quick email thank you at least. Later I come back and make sure I write a card as well.

15. We try to send hand written thank you notes to supporters annually. If there is a new congregation who sends a gift, we try to acknowledge it by email. We add them to our prayer letter list.

16. When we write thank-yous to the list of donors we get each month we try to think of some detail to share about what we're currently doing that week or month that is encouraged or enabled by their gift and prayers. We often include a picture (and yes, we attach the picture to each email with literally the slowest internet connection in the world) or some way to communicate to them how much they mean to us. (Please let Greg know if you would like samples of this)

17. Send a snail mail letter, (which may never get there!), with fun stamps and a short statement of your gratitude or a story of God at work.

18. Once connected with a congregation or individual I sent lots of thank you letters very promptly. I would write one, save it on the computer, make slight changes to it when needing to send it again to a different donor congregation. Then every three months or so would write a fresh one. I used words like 'your partnership, ' your support' 'what is happening is because of your commitment' over and over.



19. I write hand-written thank you notes to every supporter, including those who give \$25 a year. Thank, thank, thank! I tell them that they are helping to equip and shape a new generation of leaders for the church in my region.

20. Sending hand-written thank you notes along with a ministry update to all who have given to our support and sending.

21. Thank, thank and thank again. You should involve your spouse in this or kids if you have them. Or, being very careful about this, global partner ministry "beneficiaries" thanking on your behalf, but do this only from time to time.

Arranging Visits/Interpretation Assignment Focus:

22. Be proactive about arranging to visit any congregation that has been related in any way to your work or to the PC(USA)'s work in your country or area. Don't wait for them to invite you; about six months before your IA, write to them, tell them you would be grateful for a chance to visit them--even if it is to meet with their missions committee for a meal--and suggest a time to visit when you will be in their area. Remember, God has called you to be connected, deeply, to the body of Christ.

23. From our first IA, we have taken the initiative to visit supporting churches, not just waiting for World Mission or Funds Development to contact us about interested congregations.

24. As we have been planning for our upcoming IA, we are trying to contact new congregations to see their level of interest if we are passing through the area. Sometimes driving allows us to meet congregations which we didn't know in the past. (Do this in coordination with the Church Support Associate for the region – Chris Roseland, Bruce Whearty, Rachel Yates, Elizabeth Little – so we don't have 10 mission co-workers calling the same congregation.)

25. Put a lot of energy into contacting churches well in advance and filling my schedule. When I didn't have individual congregations to contact in a geographic area where I was to be, I would contact the presbytery office and told them what gaps I had. I pointed out that lots of our members are not willing to go to another nearby church for a meeting, so even if two congregations are five miles apart, I would be happy to speak at both the same day. I always gave churches a range of settings in which I would be happy to speak: worship, adult classes, with youth, women's groups, a mid-week morning Bible Study, a men's breakfast, etc. And I made sure they understood that just because they could only get five people out for something in the middle of the day midweek, it was still worthwhile. I also made comments in letters like "Your presbytery has been allocated me for the dates..." I would make it clear that I do not take need to take many days off during that period. The truth is I would prefer to pack my schedule and spend as short a time as possible in the US and then get back to my family for time off.... "So please do try to fill each day with several engagements."

26. Interpretation assignment: engaging directly with the congregations that support us (and more)-- last interpretation assignment we had 121 speaking engagements in 63 churches, 5



presbyteries, 5 seminaries and 5 universities in 19 states.

27. Be pro-active about speaking in supporting churches. When home on interpretation, we try to visit as many supporting churches as possible. If the church doesn't contact us, we contact them about coming to speak. This sometimes leads to awkwardness concerning getting reimbursed for travel expenses but we don't let that stand in the way of getting to churches.

28. Be willing to attend any gathering, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. We never know whom we will meet at these gatherings and where this contact might lead.

29. Be willing to listen to those we meet at such gatherings. It shouldn't be a one-way street in terms of only sharing about our ministry to the folks in the churches we visit. Be willing to pray for and with those we meet.

30. When we are back in the US on IA for a few months, we do 100-150 presentations. Breakfasts, Sunday school classes, mission committee meetings, minutes for mission etc. But the most effective has been when I am given the opportunity to preach. Keep offering to do more in the service, let us contribute to the liturgy, let us serve communion, let us do the Prayers of the People.

31. When I am getting ready to do IA and I might have connected with the mission committee, before I leave for the US, I will drop an email to the pastoral staff too so they aren't surprised. Sometimes you can work with the mission committee and they may not have brought the pastors in to the conversation.

Presbytery/Pastor Relationship Strategy:

32. Develop a strong connection in one presbytery and create a sense that the entire presbytery is engaged in what you are doing. For example, for the past two years we have created specific interpretation resources for our presbytery, which they use at every meeting. So maybe one meeting there is a video they show and another we have written a letter specifically to them that will be different from our regular mission connections letter. It meant being in front of over 100 congregations 4 times a year for us. That has resulted, I believe, in congregations who have not necessarily connected with us one on one before, choosing to give to World Mission because they know about us from Presbytery.

33. When we first went out, our Presbytery had a top-notch mission advocate, who was very excited to see one of their own go to the mission field. He advocated for us throughout the presbytery. During one presbytery meeting, he abruptly stood up in the back of the church and hollered out (as one does in the South) "The missionaries are coming! The missionaries are coming!" And then he made an announcement that we would be available to speak in the presbytery during our "home assignment" time. He arranged for us to spend a month in that presbytery speaking on Sundays and weekday services. Every missionary needs such an advocate.



34. If you have any good friend who is a Presbyterian pastor who has known you a while and believes in your ministry, there is a chance that he/she could do very fruitful advocacy for you among his/her circle of presbytery and pastor friends. Mission committees often ask their pastors to advise where to send money, and pastors often aren't sure what to advise, but if they have a pastor-friend who encourages people to support a particular mission co-worker, this can make a huge difference. We have received quite a few new churches in this way. Also, think back on your experiences with Presbyterian pastors. Has one ever asked you, "Is there any way I could be of help to your ministry?" If so, this is your chance to invite them to advocate for you in their presbytery and among their pastor-friends. In some cases, a weekday cup of coffee with a pastor can reap as much support as a few presentations in churches.

35. Relate to key presbytery staff, especially the presbytery exec. In a couple of situations, relating to presbytery staff has contributed to increased relations with churches within the presbytery.

Creative ideas/Children's Sermons/Sermons/Christian Education:

36. When we were itinerating, we often did Children's Sermons. We created a few videos for congregations to use for VBS, and our child created several videos in response to questions that Sunday school classes sent him. (If this is of interest to you, let Greg know and he will put you in touch with this MCW who is willing to talk with other Co-workers to give them ideas about connecting to churches through Christian education means.)

37. For Sunday School presentations or pot-luck gatherings we use a power point presentation. One year we set the slides to the song "Seeds to Sew" by Michael W. Smith. We try not to do the one slide at a time and talk thing – it can get boring and long. We usually tell our story and then show the slides. We work to be great story tellers and people like to simply hear how it is where we work.

38. Have interesting, pertinent and exciting presentation for standard interpretation in churches: Take advantage about what is unique and interesting in the place of mission. For us this has meant including in our presentation photos of lemurs, chameleons, the real-life Gecko gecko, baobab trees, daily life, etc. to take advantage of people's fascination with our country of service

39. Outside of IA, discerning with our partner congregations ways that we can share in their worship and other programmatic ministries. For example: joining a Sunday School Class through Skype to share about the life of the church in the Middle East (ME); writing curriculum segments for VBS that share the life of the church in the ME; writing Prayer of Solidarity for worship services with the suggestion of also sharing glass beads as a tangible reminder to continue praying for the church in the ME; brainstorming other tangible ideas with PCUSA partners and then following-up.



40. We always ask some questions of our host about how the group we are talking to engages in ministry and often mention it when we preach. We always weave in stories from our experiences in our countries of service. We talk about God's involvement in the world and in the lives of the individuals we work with.

41. Have one sermon that you polish and feel really comfortable with, and use it over and over again. Storytelling, Storytelling, Storytelling!

42. Care packages: Congregations seem to be most willing to send care packages as support in addition to financial donations. We always include requests for certain items from our YAVs and we ask the community to send something that all tells us about their community, church, or town. Or if there is something that a community does well, like a knitting group, that is much more meaningful than a box of chocolate. The message of the package is more important than the stuff, so this way more congregations can be a part of sending "messages" of support while also getting to know each other better.

Collaboration with Funds Development:

43. I know that we have received a lot of donations from individuals during our service. The congregation I served for 10 years is fairly affluent, and has some folks who are able and willing to make significant donations towards our support. This presented a great opportunity to collaborate with Funds Development to do an event, interpret our call to serve with the global church, and invite people to participate with us in that call. If you have this kind of a connection, Funds Development can help!

44. At one presentation, you speak to 100 people, and 6 were really excited. The next week, you go to the next congregation of 350, and maybe 10 are really excited. And you do this for 7 or 8 weeks, you end up with 50-60 really interested people. The huge blessing is to have someone from FD to follow up when you communicate with them.

Video Resources:

45. I believe creating video resources has been one of the most helpful things for connecting to congregations. A lot of churches are still wary of skyping (anxious about the technology working correctly) and so creating videos based on their questions really helped them experience what our life is like, see what we see and most importantly actually HEAR our voices.

46. Video conversation: We are working on an idea with a congregation that involves filming a video message with the children at the local church. We are sending that video to a supporting congregation. A children's group in the US congregation will watch it on a Sunday morning, and then film a response to send back to us. We hope it will involve some more understanding of each other's contexts and each other's hopes.

47. Offer to send a video clip that they can share in a worship service thanking them for their



partnership or that shares a brief story (under 2 minutes).

48. Send special picture updates/videos: For several years we put out a 1-2 page color picture thank you & summary update of our ministry. This year's was published as our first Mission Connections newsletter. Something brief with pictures helps capture people's attention and keeps them engaged.

49. When the internet is spotty and skype won't work, we record a video message and put it in dropbox for the church to use.

Skype:

50. We always suggest Skype conversations when beginning a new relationship with a community or when maintaining the relationship throughout the year and a face-to-face visit is not possible. We also send prep materials like blog posts with deeper overviews of our roles or even video messages they can watch before a Skype meeting. Congregations mention they have appreciated that opportunity. This of course depends upon internet availability.

51. We skype with many congregations, Sunday schools and even a retreat to keep in touch with people throughout the year. We've said in many newsletters and presentations we've given that we are hoping to Skype with people and connect with them this way, and it has been good. Often churches who don't support us yet have been interested in us talking to a Sunday School class, and then a few months later, we see they have given a gift.

52. Skype into churches for worship or educational classes

Blog/Monthly Newsletters/Facebook/Mission Connections Letters:

53. Blog: we are not disciplined on the blogging by any stretch of the imagination. I came in hoping to post every other week, and have failed miserably. But every time I do post, we get traffic and interest. We post a blog reflection, or pictures, or update on special developments and then we post it to Facebook and every now and then send out a mass email with review of recent posts.

54. We have chosen to use a mail service, "Mailchimp" because the letters go directly to each person on the list vs. hoping that our supporters will go to the PCUSA webpage. Even though we would like more people to read our letters, we are grateful for those who open and reply. The response/feedback is immediate. We have chosen this mail service because of security reasons as well. Our letters are no longer posted on the website.

55. We also send a monthly newsletter and write about 8 blog posts in a month. This gives people different venues to keep up to date.

56. In addition to my four hard-copy letters a year, I send out emails periodically, if I have had a particularly moving experience. I love to tell the story of what God is doing in this huge,



important, and exciting continent. I also work hard when I am on interpretation assignment to share in creative ways what God is doing in the world, and how they can be a part of that work through prayer, financial gifts, and interest in what is happening here and around the world. I also seek to encourage the young people I meet to consider international mission.

57. Share how we see/experience God at work in and through the ministry we are privileged to serve with through monthly e-letters, ministry fb page, and the mission connections letters.

58. Regular contact through FaceBook (frequent posts sharing both the life of our partners and everyday life—telling the story through FaceBook).

59. We find that the mailchimp/enewsletter where we have pictures and short blurbs, we can see how many are opening it, how many are clicking on anything to read further.

60. Writing consistent Mission Connections letters at least four times a year most years AND in recent years I sent them by e-mail at the same time I was sending them to Louisville to be printed and sent out as hard copies. I usually got far more response to the e-mail version than the printed versions.

61. Write good newsletters. Again, they are the story of what's going on here with a personal bent – we are always involved in our own stories; the newsletters are not just about the people here, but about how we live and work with those people, and how God is at work in this place.

62. Send quarterly Mission Connections letters and pictures

Communication Strategies and being responsive:

63. Stay organized. Return emails, write notes to those who write us.

64. In general, figure out with whom you should be communicating and ask for updates about that list at least yearly. Communicate as widely as you can, but assure that it follows desired protocols. Don't presume that you are meeting the church's needs via the communications in which you engage. Ask them how they feel about the relationship, ask to know where they would like to go deeper or less involvement, more or less communication.

65. Find a way to call people's cell phones or landlines, rather than trying to set up a Skype appointment. It is not quite free, but close to it, to call a landline or cell phone from a Skype account. Thank as quickly as you can after receiving a gift, even if it is a gift they are sending on a regular basis. Let them know how truly grateful you are.

66. One-liner emails and quick check-ins with donors we haven't been in touch with for a while. The random call when we have a chance.

67. Make an effort to give full answers to email inquiries from people interested in anything in



our area. We offer to help churches make connections with partners in our areas in case communications don't work.

68. Respond to emails from people in supporting churches and be a little “chatty” and friendly and kind when people from congregations initiate with you via email. This means a lot to people and can deepen relationships. Expect to be in some kind of email communication with a donor or potential donor or someone from a supporting church almost every day. Once we accept this reality, it isn't so bad, and it can be life-giving through the encouragement that ultimately comes our way.

69. Assist individual congregations, presbyteries, and other PCUSA groups (like PW) to develop effective partnerships with congregations in our region.

70. Following up on all email inquiries we've received about what's happening in our region (this has led to at least 6 contacts for our past IA).

Networking:

71. Asking individuals and churches to introduce us to others who are drawn to our region and then following-up on those email introductions.

72. Saying ‘yes’ to exploring potential ideas for connecting, no matter how big or small...it's been surprising to see where this has led.

73. Try to ask for possible connections of those we meet. Network.

74. If you went to seminary or a Christian/Presbyterian college or were involved in a Christian fellowship on campus, keep up your relationships with former classmates. Try to get them on your update letter list, and spend time with them when you are in America. As you share your excitement about what you do, some will likely want to support you.

Inviting and asking:

75. When we start talking about dollars and cents, I start stumbling over myself. Ask me to talk about how God is at work in my country, and I will happily go on for hours. But I always close with an invitation to support the work and God's mission.

76. Ask. Find out who makes the decisions, and when those decisions are made, and then ask on the phone for consideration and then also more formally via an email or letter sent from country of service. You can imagine that the latter approach is a good one.

77. Rather than ignore it, I occasionally have checked directly with a church or through someone in Louisville when a contribution suddenly stopped. And on a couple of occasions I discovered that a \$300 or \$5000 amount designated had been sent but not accounted for properly in either the presbytery or GA office - and I had not been informed and they had not been thanked.

