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N A M E  
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Network of  
Australian  
Mission  
Enthusiasts

e-zine 6

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## TOUCHING ON PRAXIS

More response was forthcoming from e-zine #5 than any previous edition. Most of the contact was from missionaries who identified with the needs referred to in the article, and some of them described times when they desperately needed the help of their church during their preparation for departure. Let's continue this theme of pastoral care and consider the role of the local church while the missionary is away from their church at their ministry location.

Epaphroditus has had more than one mention in previous e-zines, but once again his story provides us with something to consider. In writing to the Philippians, Paul describes him as "your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs" (2:25). Please note that this was not just an individual in the church deciding to use his annual holiday to go and see how Paul was doing. Paul specifically indicates that Epaphroditus was SENT by the church - this was the church at work, providing care for the one they supported through finance and prayer. The ministry nature of what Epaphroditus did is further underlined by Paul when he describes it as "the work of Christ" (2:30). The journey Epaphroditus made to visit Paul was not massive if measured in kilometres, but it was very demanding when measured by other criteria. The situation is vastly different today, with international travel being so much easier in every way. So we need to consider the possibility of the local church sending a pastor or other church representative to visit the missionary they are supporting in order to provide appropriate pastoral care.

One only has to read the last few verses of Paul's letters to realise that there was a constant flow of information between Paul and these local churches. As a consequence, Paul was assured that the churches remembered him, were concerned for his needs and saw his work as valuable. The modern missionary, serving far from his home and his local church, has need of these same assurances. A letter, a phone call, an email, is not just a means of sending information, but a way of saying to the missionary "you are not forgotten." The assurance of not being forgotten is something every missionary desperately needs to receive - it is an aspect of pastoral care that can be exercised by the home church. So let's ask the question, is every missionary your church supports assured that they are remembered? If there is any doubt, then what steps can be taken to be certain they are reassured concerning this?

In a similar way, we need to be absolutely certain that our missionaries know that we are concerned for their needs and that we see their work as valuable. The latter point obviously raises the question of what to do if we don't think their work is valuable, but that is an issue better dealt with under the topic of local church and mission relationships rather than here.



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