WE HAVE STOPPED SUPPORTING YOUR MINISTRY!

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Category: Observations

Blog posts about the relationships between churches and missionaries can be informative, but they are rarely a bundle of laughs. Â However, Rollin Grams has pulled off the seemingly impossible feat of finding humour in this situation with his letter from the Church at Antioch explaining why they can no longer support Paul, Silas and Timothy.

> *Greetings from Antioch.Â We trust you are well and that your ministry in Corinth is also continuing well.Â Our mission committee met last week to discuss your work, and we have decided to discontinue the annual support that we have been sending for your ministry.Â You are probably wondering what led us to this decision, and so here are ten of our primary concerns.*
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> *First, of the three of you, only Paul was originally sent out from this church.Â Silas is from Jerusalem, and Timothy is from Lystra.Â Our policy is to support missionaries who come from Antioch.Â Also, our policy is to support our missionaries at 5% of their total support needs, and we expect them to find the rest of their support from other churches.Â We, however, will not support missionaries who do not come from our own church.*

Just read that last paragraph again; it's brilliant.

> *Fifth, we have over the years taken on new projects for support that some of our newer members want to supportâ€"members who do not remember you or who never met you.Â We now support a pregnancy support ministry here in Antioch, a feeding and clean water programme in the region of Tyre and Sidon, an elementary schools project in rural areas of Syria, and so forth.Â We simply cannot support every worthy cause, and these are causes that our church members get enthused about.Â Our congregation likes to support projects more than missionaries.Â We also, as you will notice from these places of ministry, think that we should focus more on ministry closer to home than to the ends of the earth, as it were.Â In addition, and to be perfectly honest, hearing that you are only involved in preaching the Gospel and teaching theology and not in some tangible ministry that makes a difference in peopleâ€™s lives is a concern for us. Â Ever since we combined benevolence funding along with our missionary support, we have been increasingly interested in funding those projects.*
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> *Sixth, we have also had word that you are working on the side by making tents in order to make ends meet.Â We did not send you out so that you could spend your time working a job; we expected you to be involved in ministry full-time if we support you.Â We know that working in the market-place is a good way to meet people and do relational evangelism, but it sounds to us as though you are getting two salaries...*

There is a lot more really good stuff in the original, make sure you read it all.

This piece is more true of the US than it is of the UK and it certainly doesn't reflect our experience of working with supporting churches. However, it does highlight the fact that our mission support systems are complex. There are at least three parties; the missionary, the agency and the church (or multiple churches) who will want to have input into the work of the missionary. Things can only sensibly be worked out through dialogue and discussion, but that takes significant time and effort.

For a quick look at my view of the place of churches and agencies, have a look at this.