# THREE UNMENTIONABLE THINGS

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Three areas that we don't like to think about, but which need to be part of any church's thinking about world mission.
**Category:** Observations

From time to time, churches ask me to review their missionary policy documents. This is something that I'm generally pretty happy to do and I usually find it a very encouraging activity. There is something exciting about seeing the way in which a group of Christians are working out the best way for them to be involved in what God is doing across the globe.

If truth be told, most church mission policy documents have a fair bit of rather dull administrative detail; how candidates will be selected, how financial support will be calculated and distributed etc. However, the important thing is to see beyond the details, to look at how pro-active the church is being, to see the mission heart that lies behind the policy statements. Seemingly dry phrases about support can sometimes disguise really radical thinking and deep understanding of the current situation. There is good stuff in some of these statements.

However, in my experience, there are three things which are often missing from church mission policies; things which are difficult to talk about, but which are important to think through. These are all issues that you hope you will never have to deal with, but if you do, you really want to have good guidelines in place rather than having to make up policy on the hoof. These are the things that kept me awake at night when I was in mission leadership.

**Relationship Breakdown:Â** what happens when your church missionary falls out with the agency that they are working for? What is your role as a church in this mess? It is normal, perhaps even right, for churches to take the side of their missionary in any dispute, but how can they ensure that they are getting both sides of the story? Mission agencies do make mistakes, but some missionaries are pains in the neck. Navigating this sort of thing can be difficult for churches and it helps to have thought through some principles in advance.

**Moral Lapse:** Missionaries aren't immune to temptation. All of the sexual temptations that face people at home are present in other parts of the world; sometimes more so. It is inevitable that some missionaries will fall prey to temptation of one form or another. It is rare that mission agencies or receiving churches will have the resources to provide counselling and support to help people overcome these issues on the mission field - that is not what they are equipped to do, its not their purpose. Sending churches will have some sort of role to play when this happens. Every case is different, but it helps to have some principles thought through in advance for dealing with issues like this.

**Contingency Issues:Â** the world is getting more dangerous and the places with the fewest Christians are also some of the most perilous in the world. If you are going to be sending people into hostile environments, you need to think through your reaction if things turn sour. Missionaries do find themselves in war zones, caught up in local conflicts or victims of terror attacks. As a sending church, you don't have the ability to make decisions for people on the ground, but you need to be certain that there are appropriate plans in place, that these plans will be followed and that there will be good support available for people who have been traumatised.

I don't want to sound alarmist; the majority of missionaries go through long careers without any of these issues rearing their ugly heads. However, for those folks which do face these issues, it really helps to have a calm, supportive church who are able to react wisely and in a thought through manner in the face of complex and confusing situations.

There is one other issue that I should mention in passing. Because of the confusion between missiology and ecclesiology that exists in the West, many missionaries are supported by more than one church. This is something that church mission policies need to take into account, it's no good one supporting church saying one thing while another says something different. When relationships get difficult, it isn't unknown for missionaries to play supporting churches and their agency off against each other - life is so much easier for everyone, if the churches get their acts together.