

Advocacy Teams at Imago Dei Church

Supporting Those Gone Out for the Sake of the Name

Principles for Supporting Those We Send

Our Lord has impressed on the hearts of some members of our local church to leave the comforts of home, their friends and family, and the joys worshiping each week with this church body. They forsook all these things and have gone out from among us to take the Gospel across geographic, language, and cultural barriers to people who have never had an opportunity to hear the name of Jesus. They have “gone out [from us, Imago Dei Church] for the sake of the name” (3 John 7).

Many are laboring in difficult places among difficult people. We “ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 8). We support our missionaries by consistently praying, generously giving, faithfully going, and purposefully sending for the spread of the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth.

- **Pray** - We partner with our missionaries by consistently praying for them and the fruitfulness of the gospel among the unreached places and peoples where they are serving.¹
- **Give** - We provide for our missionaries by generously giving for the spread of the gospel, the making of disciples, and the planting of churches around the world.²
- **Go** - We team with our missionaries by faithfully going here and there: here, when we seek the lost around us with missional intentionality in our everyday lives and relationships;³ and there, when we take [short trips](#) to encourage, serve, evangelize, and disciple alongside them.⁴
- **Send** - We multiply the reach of the gospel, disciples, and churches among all peoples everywhere by purposefully raising up, equipping, and sending more missionaries to unreached peoples and places.⁵

Pioneer missionary to India, William Carey, famously said to his friend and pastor, Andrew Fuller, “I will go down into the pits, if you will hold the ropes.”⁶ We want to be a church of people who are willing to **hold the ropes for those we send**. One of the most practical ways we can support those we send to make disciples and plant churches among the nations is through something called an Advocacy Team.

¹ Psalm 126:5-6; Psalm 127:1; Ephesians 6:19; Philippians 1:3-5; Colossians 4:2-4, 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:1

² Psalm 68:5; Mark 12:41; Luke 3:11; Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-37; 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:1-2; Philippians 4:10-20; 1 Tim. 6:17-19

³ Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:1-11

⁴ Philippians 2:25-30

⁵ Psalm 67; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 13:1-3; 14:21-23, 26; Romans 10:13-15; 15:18-21

⁶ See a helpful article describing this dynamic below: www.imb.org/2017/06/28/hold-ropes-plea-pastors-churches/

Advocacy Teams

Advocacy Teams are one of the most tangible expressions of our church's commitment to support the missionaries who have gone out from among us to serve the nations. Advocacy Teams serve as **a critical connection** between Imago Dei Church as a whole and the missionary.

Purpose of Advocacy Teams

The purpose of an Advocacy Team is **to provide proactive support to those who have gone out from among us for the sake of the name**.

Advocacy Responsibilities

Imago Dei Church is committed to providing a team of members for each missionary that fulfills **three ongoing responsibilities** as advocates:

- 1)** To the Father from the church by **praying fervently** for the missionary and their ministry.
- 2)** To the missionary from the church by **caring for the missionary** as representatives of Imago Dei Church as a whole.
- 3)** To the church from the missionary by **representing the missionary** to the church in their absence.

An Advocacy Team should be postured toward the missionary, intent on ensuring they are receiving prayer and care. From that missionary oriented posture, they may have opportunities to make other church members aware of the lives and ministries of their missionary (e.g. at growth group, in casual conversation on Sunday morning, while serving in childcare, at a book study, etc).

Given the critical role of Advocacy Teams to support those we send, missionaries are encouraged to be open and honest with their Advocacy Team, sharing areas of struggle, defeat, grace, and growth. This allows the members of their Advocacy Team to more faithfully pray for them, effectively care for them, and accurately represent their challenges and victories to the members and leaders of Imago Dei Church.

Roles for Advocacy Teams

An Advocacy Team should include **8-10 church members**, made up of **6-8 members** who either have a close relational connection to the missionary and/or can commit to faithfully serve as an Advocacy Team Member. An Advocacy Team will be led by **1-2 leaders**, an Advocacy Team Leader, who will bear the primary responsibility of keeping the team on track and fulfilling the regular and occasional rhythms of care for their missionary.

The success or failure of an Advocacy Team largely depends on the Advocacy Team Leader, who should provide leadership in scheduling meetings, onboarding new members to the team, maintaining communication with their missionary, updating the elders, and ensuring their missionary is being cared for regularly and supported appropriately. The Advocacy Team Leader does not need to do everything, but does need to take the lead in making sure everything gets done.

Over time, Advocacy Team Members may leave the church (or need to cycle off). Advocacy Teams may be replenished with other church members, provided they are approved by the Advocacy Team Leader and the missionary.

What An Advocacy Team Does

An Advocacy Team should focus their energies on **four primary tasks** that make up the regular rhythms of care for the missionary. Occasionally, an Advocacy Team will have the privilege of serving a missionary in **other ways**.

Four Tasks—Regular Rhythms for Care:

1) Weekly Check Ins

Advocacy Teams should work with their missionary to establish and maintain a system for group messaging (WhatsApp, Signal, Voxer). All members of the Advocacy Team should be added to this group message. Missionaries are encouraged to send updates about their lives and requests for prayer on a weekly basis. These do not need to be long, but can simply be a brief message or quick voice memo. As missionaries are able, share photos, videos, and stories about their lives, the place where they are living, and the people they are seeking to reach. Advocacy Teams are encouraged to send reminders, encouragement, scripture, prayers, happy birthdays, life and church updates to their missionary through this avenue of frequent communication.

2) Monthly Video Calls

Advocacy Teams should work with their missionary to schedule and participate in a monthly hour long video call. These calls should focus on three areas: (1) cultivating friendship between Advocacy Team members and their missionary; (2) hearing about areas of struggle, defeat, grace and growth in the life of their missionary; and (3) praying together for one another, their missionary's endeavors, and the people they are seeking to reach. Follow this [link](#) for a simple resource with categories and questions that could be helpful to talk about with your missionary on these calls. Given significant challenges with frequent travel, full ministry schedules, time zones, and occasional power/internet issues for many missionaries, a missionary and Advocacy Team should set a goal of hosting a video call no less than 9 out of 12 months. We would encourage you to pause these calls while a missionary comes on stateside and host a monthly get together in person instead.

3) Monthly Updates to the Elders

A designated person on the Advocacy Team is responsible for filling out a brief survey to update the elders after each monthly video call (should only take 10 minutes). The focus of these updates is for the Advocacy Team to give the elders an accurate picture of the spiritual health, practical viability, and missional progress of their missionary. Please, use the following form to submit these updates after each video call: [Advocacy Updates Form](#). These will automatically be shared with the elders upon submission.

4) Yearly Care Packages

The holidays (Thanksgiving and Christmas) are particularly difficult seasons for our missionaries who are often unable to travel to visit family. We ask Advocacy Teams to pull together and prepare a care package for Imago Dei Church to send to their missionary in November each year. See the following link for a care package checklist and timeline: [How to Do a Care Package](#).

Other Ways to Serve—Occasional Care:

1) Deployment, Re-Entry, and Stateside Support

There are three moments of transition that are oftentimes particularly challenging for

missionaries: (1) the 3-6 months leading up to deployment, (2) their re-entry to the states, and (3) their time on stateside assignment. Advocacy Teams should communicate with their missionaries and proactively seek to help them with the practical realities of preparing to deploy as well as re-entering for a temporary or long-term stateside. Advocacy Teams are encouraged to reach out to the Pastor for Missions and Evangelism to help build a plan of support for their missionaries 3-6 months before re-entry. This kind of support could include but are not limited to the following.

Logistical: helping them to secure housing, transportation, schooling, furniture, groceries, etc.

Relational: being a friend to them, making time for them, inviting them into the rhythms of your life and the lives of your children.

Educational: learning from them, listening to their stories, growing from their discipleship, their knowledge of God and his world.

2) Visits / Mission Trips

One of the ways we partner with our missionaries and church planters is by taking short trips to encourage, serve, evangelize, and disciple alongside them in their place of ministry. We want all short term trips to be built around our Advocacy Teams. This will allow short term teams to maintain relational and contextual continuity, since these Advocacy Teams already maintain regular rhythms of prayer, communication, and support for their assigned missionaries. Advocacy Teams should become very familiar with [IDC's Short Term Strategy](#) document, following the direction and guidelines therein for any trips they take to come alongside their missionary.

3) Represent Them Publicly

Advocacy Teams may be asked to represent their missionary in a variety of ways at various points in the life of the church. Representation of the missionaries to the church will primarily involve (a) communicating general information to the IDC elders, (b) communicating prayer requests and occasional updates to the church body, and (c) organizing to provide for practical support, as needed. Examples of ways Advocacy Teams may be asked to represent their missionary are as follows: running a display table in the church lobby on a Sunday morning; providing a brief update to the church body at a worship gathering or members meeting; or providing a few prayer points from your missionary for missions spotlight.

FAQs About Advocacy Teams

1) Can a Growth Group be the Advocacy Team for a missionary?

While some or all of a Growth Group might be a part of an Advocacy Team, we advise that the Advocacy Team not simply be the Growth Group. Why? Advocacy Teams thrive on stability of membership. In the life of Imago Dei Church, we experience significant transience between our Growth Groups both for leaders and members. While missionaries are encouraged to have helping/encouraging relationships with one or many Growth Groups, these should be distinct from the Advocacy Team.

2) How does an advocacy team get started?

Once an aspiring missionary has been given the go ahead from the elders, they may begin recruiting church members to form their Advocacy Team. They should look to invite folks onto this team who meet the following characteristics: (1) they are willing to commit to serve as an advocate for an entire term—usually 3 years; (2) they are faithful and will follow through on their commitment; and (3) they have a strong relationship with the missionary. Once the missionary has recruited 6-10 members and a leader, they should work with their leader to host an initial gathering for the Advocacy Team to set expectations and begin the partnership well. Once their Advocacy Team is formed, the missionary should communicate the leader and members to the Pastor for Missions and Evangelism, Zac Lyons (zac@idcraleigh.com).

3) What other kinds of things can Advocacy Teams do?

Advocacy Teams should feel the freedom to consider creative ways to care for, support, and even serve alongside their missionaries (e.g., partnering for evangelism before departure, learning about the destination culture and worldview, seeking to engage their focus people group here in Raleigh, etc).

4) As an Advocacy Team Leader, what is expected of me?

An Advocacy Team Leader, who will bear the primary responsibility of keeping the team on track and fulfilling the regular and occasional rhythms of care for their missionary. The success or failure of an Advocacy Team largely depends on the Advocacy Team Leader, who should provide leadership in scheduling meetings, onboarding new members to the team, maintaining communication with their missionary, updating the elders, and ensuring their missionary is being cared for regularly and supported appropriately. The Advocacy Team Leader does not need to do everything, but does need to take the lead in making sure everything gets done.

5) As a missionary, what is expected of me regarding my Advocacy Team?

As a missionary, you have five responsibilities regarding your Advocacy Team: (1) forming and preparing a strong team of 6-10 church members before deployment; (2) being regular and responsive in maintaining communication with your Advocacy Team and Leader; (3) proactively sending updates about your life and requests for prayer on a weekly basis and making time for those monthly video calls; (4) being open and honest with your Advocacy Team, sharing areas of struggle, defeat, grace, and growth; (5) assisting your Advocacy Team Leader and Pastor for Missions and Evangelism to rebuild your Advocacy Team as folks roll off or leave the church—especially important while you are in the Raleigh-Durham area on stateside assignment.

6) As a member of Imago Dei Church, what is my first step if I want to serve as an Advocate on one of these teams?

The first step to becoming an Advocate is filling out an interest form. We will use the information you provide to pair you with a missionary's Advocacy Team that fits best. Follow the link to fill out this [Advocacy Interest Form](#).

7) As an Advocate, what should we talk to our missionary about?

Follow this [link](#) for a simple resource with categories and questions that could be helpful to talk about with your missionary on your regular calls.

8) What words should we avoid for security reasons when communicating about or with your missionary?

When talking about your missionary in public or online, talk about their legitimate access solution, the food, language, sights, music, culture, their family life, and the fact that they are Christians who are involved in local churches. Don't use the term "missionary" or "mission work" as they have negative connotations in many parts of the world. Don't share the name or information of their ministry organization. Don't share their personal contact information, location, country, city, pictures, etc (unless with their permission). Don't forward their email updates to others without their permission.

When writing or talking with your missionary over the web, it is okay to give updates on your life and how they can pray for you. It is okay to ask questions about their personal and spiritual lives, and their work. It is okay to share a word of encouragement with them. Avoid naming their ministry organization. Don't use terms like "missionary," "mission work," "church," "church planting," "evangelism," "discipleship," "Jesus," etc. Instead, use terms like "worker," "field work," "fellowship or community," "starting communities," "sowing seeds," "training or equipping," "the Son," etc.

9) Who should I contact for help?

For assistance in carrying out this task, please feel free to contact the Pastor for Missions and Evangelism, Zac Lyons (zac@idcraleigh.com).