

## **NZR Roundtable session 28 September 2023**

### ***Contribution Eunice Anita-Offerman***

#### **Some practical points on mission (trips)**

This afternoon, I want to share with you some points that influences the practice of missionary.

It is often thought that very large and complicated subjects weight the most, but from the stories I will share with you, it will become clear that the frustrations and irritations come from an often rather simple and sometimes overlooked angle.

1. Language and language barrier is and remains a thing. Especially if the government of the country in which the missionary is located communicates only in the local language. From SKIN we noticed this in the early onset of the corona crisis. Lots of information were only in Dutch; it was later on that information was provided in more languages.

I help Spanish speaking missionaries with questions on their tax forms and even banking stuff here in the Netherlands. The website of the Tax Authority (Belastingdienst) is only in Dutch. Some banks have information on their website and forms only in Dutch.

This situation is usually the case too in Spanish speaking countries.

Another aspect related to language is, when being away for a long time and haven spoken mainly another language than the mother tongue e.g., only English, it can become difficult to live and function in only the mother tongue. Mainly the expectation people have for and from you on this matter can become a burden.

2. Culture and customs. If there is no person in the country of destination to guide the missionary on daily customs and practices, the missionary will experience some frustrations and irritations in the first months. Some examples are:

- The food.
- Loud music on the street or at home is normal in some countries and in others it is not done!

A few points typical of the Netherlands:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of the month, the alarm goes off at Noon for testing. I forgot to tell this to my acquaintance who moved earlier this year to the Netherlands. When sharing with her what I was going to present this afternoon and I mentioned the alarm, her reaction was: **OH, so that is what is happening!!!**
- Houses with up to 4 trash cans. What's what I was asked by my acquaintance. It was not clear for her which is for what.

3. There are countries that have specific regulations for missionaries that can impact their daily life. For example, an acquaintance of mine moved to South Africa as a missionary and it turned out that she was not allowed to have a paying job or have her own bank account there. Because she was living in with locals, that was not a problem, yet it was not comfortable.

4. What about health insurance and doctor visits?

Not all countries have a healthcare system like the Netherlands.

5. Physical changes. After 15 years in the Netherlands, my body said, okay, you're now European! I do not like that warm weather on Curaçao anymore. I had to go to the doctor for medicine.

Similarly, people from Europe who move to a different climate will sooner or later experience physical changes. Your body adapts to her environment. This should be taken into account when considering how long a person will stay on a mission.

6. Think differently. To live amid another culture, changes your thinking. Sometimes so strong that your home front doesn't understand you anymore.

7. Sacrifices that are made.

I once had a colleague who moved abroad from the Netherlands. His wife was keen to serve in an African country through an organization. He went with her. He was able to work there through the same company as we were working for in the Netherlands at the time, but on local terms. That all sounds good, only his salary would be converted into euros equal to 25 euro's a month. Colleagues wondered how he was going to deal with his pension. Paying a pension premium over EUR 25, - or 2,500 euro's is a big difference.

The Dutch society assumes that you will accrue your pension while working for when you stop working around the age of 67. Is this a real scenario for the missionary? Has he/she been able to put enough aside for this?

The Old-age pension (AOW) from the government will be shortened for the period the missionary lived abroad and had not contributed to the fund. This has its impact on the lifestyle of the missionary after the mission.

The missionary's children are also giving in. If the parents are willing to earn less financially than they could do in order to be there for others, that means that as a child, you also give something in. Less new clothes or shoes. Less outings, etc. Not all children understand this at first which can lead to dissatisfaction, opposing teenagers and sometimes the family becomes a dysfunctional family.

8. Registration in the country of destination. Do countries have mandatory integration course (inburgeringscursus) as the Netherlands has? Or do they have

other type of mandatory courses or specifics for visa applications even when you are already in the country?

Sometimes the missionary is at the mercy of the officials who review the application. This happened to me. I felt powerless and then the process that followed was all a waste of my time.

9. Means of transport. In the Netherlands you have a bicycle, or you use public transport which is well arranged, though expensive.

Public transport in many countries outside of Europe are NOT as well organized or reliable and the use of bicycle is simply not done. How independent is the missionary in finding his/her own way in the country of destination?

10. Security. Not in the sense of terrorism or belief. The little things like burglary and pickpocket can disturb your entire experience in a place. Know beforehand the specifics of a particular area in a country before sending missionaries there. As a missionary you will stand out and be recognizable in the area.

11. Place of residence

Who's arranging it? How sure is it and for how long?

This matters a lot.

12. Earn the trust from local people

This is something that takes time. This can sometimes take years. Is there space for this in the schedule?

How prepared are the people being sent for this? Sometimes people think that because I am going to do the work of the Lord, all will be well. Yes, at the end it will all be well but at the start there will be some adversities.

Do not forget that some places are, in the wrong sense, spiritually heavy.

13. Return?

I can imagine that the missionary begins his/her journey with the thought of returning to the country of origin after a few years.

How realistic is this if there have been no interim visits to the 'home country'?

The longer gone, the harder it is to integrate again. Society has evolved both at home and in the country of mission. What does this mean to the missionary. Will he/she become a stranger in his/her own country?

Closing remarks:

I hope that these practical points I brought forward contribute to our discussions this afternoon.