

# Member Care

Avail's Approach to Supporting  
and Caring for Mission Workers



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The trustees of Avail combined their efforts, experience and knowledge to prepare this manual of Member Care. When we agreed on our new name Avail and our strapline Serving those who Serve we believed they adequately explained our vision. So nearly two decades later here is our manual on the inner working of the mission.

We haven't majored on one type of ministry as we believe our Lord blesses His people with ministries and gifts so varied that there are too many to list or even imagine.

So here we are in 2023 the Avail family represented by single men and women, married couples and some with children.

Their ages range from twenties to eighties the oldest being eighty-five and still counting!

What an inspiration they are as they pursue their God-given call to GO' in the sure knowledge that He will fulfil His promise to lead and guide them.

If you would like a printed copy please contact the Leeds office, and we will send you one.

## THE TRUSTEES

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# Member Care

## AVAIL'S APPROACH TO SUPPORTING AND CARING FOR MISSION WORKERS

### IT TAKES TWO

For any relationship to work well, there needs to be mutual understanding and cooperation. This is how we would like our relationship to work with those who partner with Avail. Because we honour the call God has placed on them, it means we respect their freedom to do as He leads. We also expect our mission partners to understand the calling the Lord has placed on us. This has not essentially changed from when we first started but years of experience and many lessons learned have helped shape where we are and how we operate.

We want to partner as friends, rather than be viewed, or act, merely as a faceless charity or as a provider of convenient legal cover. A meaningful and open relationship is therefore important to us.

This document aims to provide clear guidelines on how we see our partnership working practically in terms of expectations and responsibilities. Our bedrock is a biblical perspective that determines our values and drives the mission: to honour God and reflect His glory. It also takes into account our legal duties to the Charity Commission.

Not least, we answer practical questions that naturally arise for those working in mission and wanting to partner with us.

### OUR APPROACH

#### APPLYING TO AVAIL

**Q** Do you tell people where to go on the mission field?

**A** No. We are prepared to make suggestions but, ultimately, we believe the Lord will direct your path.

**Q** Will you tell me what to do when I am on the mission field?

**A** No. But if, for example, you tell us that the Lord has called you to be a church leader when you have no previous experience in that area, we would naturally have to enquire further.

**Q** How would you respond if I applied but then felt unable to sign indicating acceptance of the requirements outlined in the application process?

**A** Naturally we would ask why, and probably request a face-to-face meeting to discuss your reservations.

**Q** How would you feel if after such a discussion I still felt unable to sign?

**A** We would of course be disappointed. However, if it became clear that a compromise wasn't possible, we would have to suspend the application process.

**Q** Would you really refuse to accept my application?

**A** We would. This is because we would not be able to support you if there are unresolved differences in how we perceive working together.

**Q** If I were seriously ill, with little hope of a return to full health and strength, does this mean my application would be refused?

**A** Not necessarily, but before deciding we would want to know more about your health situation. We will try to agree a way to assist and will document any arrangements we agree between us.

**Q** Why does Avail ask for confirmation of acceptance of the **Statement of Faith, Member Care and Core Principles**

**A** Whilst there are always going to be different views on secondary issues we believe there are certain truths and principles regarding faith, conduct and social issues which it is important we agree upon from the outset of our relationship to avoid misunderstandings and disappointment at a later stage.

**Q** I have read your document **Crisis Management**. Don't you think these precautions you suggest are a little extreme? Shouldn't I be left to trust the Lord without these, no matter what?

**A** We do not believe that identifying specific areas of risk and preparing practically to minimise them contradicts trusting the Lord, who calls us to be both responsible and fully trusting in His protection.

**Q** How else should I be accountable to Avail?

**A** Each month we remind mission workers to prepare a thirty-word prayer request which is part of the acceptance of being a partner. We call it 'Prayer Prompt' and it is simply what the title says, 'Prompt' (not a report). Along with every Prompt we produce what is called 'Prayer Prompt Extra' which is an invitation to partners to contribute a 200-word report accompanied by a photograph.

## DISCLAIMER

Should it come to the attention of Avail trustees during its partnership with mission workers that one of its members has developed toxic patterns of behaviour or acted in a way that harms the reputation of Avail and its members – more importantly, the Lord Himself – we will not take responsibility for the member's actions and their consequences. Avail will withdraw its support, which may also lead to dismissal in accordance with its discipline and dismissal process.

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE SENDING CHURCH

**Q** In what way do you suggest a mission worker should be accountable ?

**A** We believe an effective way is to agree with the church how often you will send them an update. This way they will get to know how you are getting on and be able to support you more meaningfully. Try different ways of keeping in touch, such as WhatsApp, Zoom, or hand written cards and letters.

**Q** A church leader insists we do things his way, is this acceptable ?

**A** Out of a right attitude for those exercising spiritual authority, we encourage respectful acknowledgement of the leader's wisdom and advice. However, misuse of authority, overbearing control, or inappropriate intrusion into incidental matters or matters of conscience, would be very concerning and is not acceptable. We would be prepared to act as intermediaries if required.

**Q** Do you think that I should be accountable to my supporters for money given for my personal use?

**A** You shouldn't be expected to account for how you spend your money. Like anyone else, it is yours to use it as you see fit, provided of course that you are not using it for anything that would be considered harmful to yourself or others. Of course, you are accountable for it to your spouse and to the Lord.

**Q** We also receive funding from the church and other supporters for projects. Should we be accountable to them for this?

**A** Yes, of course.

## AVAIL'S POSITION ON KEY ISSUES

Under the following headings, we focus on specific issues which we consider fundamental to being part of Avail. They are to do with beliefs, values and behaviour. We expect Avail partners to embrace them as part of their own values.

### CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Most of those partnering with Avail are working, or will work, in countries away from their birth country. This brings new and ongoing challenges in adapting to cultures quite different from their own, whether in public settings, workplaces or in the church. Mistakes in what we say or do are often unavoidable, even by people who have lived abroad for many years. Drawing on wise advice from experienced people and locals, and being willing to listen and observe, are good ways to avoid pitfalls and learn to enjoy the new culture.

Above all, we need to live in a way that does not make others feel that they are inferior or superior. It can be easy to feel frustrated if local customs seem to limit the way in which we carry out our ministry, but we can trust God to work through all things if we keep our hearts humble before Him.

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

In John Wesley's sermon The use of money, he wrote: "Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can." We would add to this: "Act righteously in both personal and business finances whether you are receiving or giving money."

The existence of serious debt can negatively impact dependents. Where possible, every effort should be made to maintain a standard of living for them that will not cause a loss of respect or possible damage to their well-being.

We expect appropriate use of allocated donations, ensuring that personal money is kept and recorded separately from work accounts.

Financial mismanagement, using allocated funds for other purposes, fraud or theft, is clearly unacceptable.

## HEALTH AND EMERGENCY NEEDS

Avail does not offer loans or funding for health and emergency needs. We advise you to have insurance in place to cover all eventualities, such as the cost of repatriation, emergency flights and health costs for which Avail cannot be held responsible. Having insurance is not only for your protection, but for others you love and care about. In a critical incident, this could spare your family, friends and supporters from having to pay significant costs when they, (not to mention you) will have other worries on their mind, and practical decisions to make on your behalf.

## RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENTS

There is increasing evidence of governments liaising closely on matters of finance, immigration, and crime. These agreements include where people go, what they do and even their attitudes. In many developing countries you could previously get away with a fairly relaxed approach to a country's laws and regulations, but the changing global scene suggests governments are now far less tolerant. Belonging to the most persecuted people group in the world, Christians are particularly exposed to scrutiny. Avail, too, is not immune, especially in countries where we have local registration. The questionable actions of a mission worker can have repercussions on the mission itself. For example, if a mission worker is discovered to have avoided paying tax – courting the risk of being expelled from the country – Avail could also come under close scrutiny and be banned from working there.

## RETURNING HOME - DEBRIEFING SESSIONS

Returning from the mission field to the home country comes with many stresses and adjustments, often much bigger than leaving on mission in the first place.

In our experience, missionaries benefit greatly from 'debriefing', which gives them an opportunity to talk through this change in a structured way. We have used the services of a trained Christian counsellor whom we trust and respect.

Those helped include people who thought they didn't need help, but afterwards were very grateful that they took the opportunity and were often surprised how much it was needed.

In light of this we are now making it our formal policy for mission workers to set up a time with the counsellor, usually after three months of returning but no longer than five months.

There is no charge to you as we have an arrangement with the counsellor.

Because we believe this is a proven way of serving you, this will become part of our accountability process and is being incorporated into our accountability document.

## ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR

We take very seriously any abusive behaviour by a mission partner, whether it is physical, emotional or spiritual. We include intimidation, bullying, harassment, persistent blame of others, manipulation, coercion or using finances as a means of control.

## DISCRIMINATION AND DEFAMATION

We recognise that we live in communities which can be very mixed and diverse. Often there is peaceful co-existence and respect but sometimes people become inconsiderate, harshly judgmental or unfeeling towards others who see things differently.

While maintaining our Christian beliefs, we also need to maintain a Christian spirit. We would be concerned if attitudes are held or expressed that denigrate another race, faith or gender.

We also hold as unacceptable the defamation of another person's character through libel or slander.

## SANCTITY OF LIFE, MARRIAGE AND SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS

We believe in the sanctity and preservation of life from conception to end of life. We believe that marriage is between a man and a woman and sexual activity is to be within marriage. Since this is what scripture teaches, we expect those in the Avail Family to hold the same view.

Regarding same sex relationships we hold to the views expressed in the article by Evangelical Alliance entitled **Biblical and pastoral responses to homosexuality**.

Please refer to the following link: <https://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/biblical-and-pastoral-responses-to-homosexuality>

## HOW DOES AVAIL REACT IF ITS PARTNERS ACT CONTRARY TO ITS VALUES?

Our aim as a mission is to provide 'spiritual, emotional and practical support to mission workers in partnership with churches.' In reading scripture, we recognise that part of spiritual support means restoring people who have deliberately or unintentionally acted in a way that has caused harm to others, to themselves and to their Christian witness. Sometimes guidance is all that is needed, at other times we may be obliged to begin a process of discipline.

## OUR PROCESS OF DISCIPLINE AND DISMISSAL

In certain circumstances we may need to warn mission workers that their teaching and/or actions require us to step in, otherwise the name of the Lord may be brought into disrepute and the standing of Avail or sending churches jeopardised. Furthermore, we are legally required to follow Charity Commission and banking rules, and any breaches of these may require us to give immediate notice of our withdrawal of support.

Recognising that most problems are errors of judgement, we adopt a nine month process that would include any or all of the following: a verbal warning, a written warning and potential suspension. The latter would include removal of our promotional support. If a resolution is not found by the end of the suspension period, we would issue a termination notification letter ending all support including any gift aid claims. In this case, the mission worker will still be granted a further three months to inform all their supporters that they should cancel all their donations including Gift Aid claims. After the three months any monies we receive will be transferred to our fund for missionaries in need.

Avail remains hopeful that where disciplinary matters have been addressed, even those resulting in dismissal, there might still be the possibility of restoration as a result of dialogue between Avail and other supporters, such as the sending church, counsellors, and so on.

# How Avail Began

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Back in the late 1980s Chris French visited missionaries in Malawi, only to discover that the couple were exceptionally short of funds. On return to the UK he contacted a number of people about the situation, and gradually a warm response ensured their support and financial security. Returning to Malawi a year later, the concept of starting a mission seemed sensible, and so we started to grow a bit, simply calling ourselves Malawi Mission Project. They were good days as the Lord continued to bless us. Don't they say, 'Time waits for no man'? We soon recognised that change was needed. It first came by changing our name to International Mission Project and then by registering as a charity with the Charity Commission. So, in January 1993 we received our official status. We were growing up! In the next ten years we tried our hand at circulating a magazine called 'Head to Head' and began organising mini conferences. Despite some heartaches, they were great years of blessing during which time we gained some good trustees. Others have been added since, and we are grateful for their help and contribution.

By 2012 we felt ready to rebrand. This brought many changes, not least a new name. Struggling to come to agreement on a new name, we invited a friend along to one of our meetings to help us. As the day wore on without any inspiration, he suggested, 'Why don't we pray?' We did, and before long he suggested, 'How about Avail?' And that was that. Looking up the meaning, we could see it perfectly captured the sense of our strapline, 'Serving those who Serve.' We felt we had come of age, though we hasten to add that we are still learning, and mistakes do still occur. As of 2023 we are revamping our website, and there are several other projects ahead that will continue to take us forward.

The Lord has abundantly blessed His work, and we are thankful for that. What of the future? We know one thing for certain: we intend it to remain firmly in His hands. Which is why we continue to trust, depend on and be accountable to Him, our Saviour and Friend whom we love and serve.

## OUR MISSION

Avail seeks to glorify Jesus Christ by providing spiritual, emotional and practical support to mission workers in partnership with churches.

# Avail

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE

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