

IMB notes ways to support returning missionaries

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—With the Southern Baptist Convention's [International Mission Board](#) expecting hundreds of missionaries to leave their positions in the coming months, the board has published a list of ways individuals and churches can support field personnel returning to the United States.

IMB President David PlattAccording to a question-and-answer article posted on the IMB website, at least 600 field personnel and stateside staff members are expected to resign as a result of a voluntary retirement incentive offered to all personnel age 50 and older with five or more years of service and a subsequent “hand-raising opportunity” for all remaining personnel to indicate a call from God to pursue non-IMB ministry opportunities.

An undated document, “Ways to Support Your Field Personnel as they Return to the U.S.,” recommends churches form re-entry teams to assist returning missionaries with practical services, friendship and prayer.

Suggestions include:

- Let returning missionaries talk about their experiences. “Perhaps you could interview them during a worship service, invite them to lead a prayer time or share during life-group or Sunday school times,” the document states.
- Be sensitive to culture shock as missionaries readjust to life in America. “Reconciling differences in the cultures, such as the materialism of the West as opposed to the poverty and suffering of

developing cultures, can create stress,” according to the document.

- Give missionaries some breathing room while not neglecting to stay in touch with them. Guard against overwhelming them when they first arrive and disappearing later.
- Help them network with associational and state missions leaders who can connect them with ministry opportunities that fit their gifts and talents. Churches also should be prepared to recommend returning missionaries for ministry opportunities that suit them.
- Contact the IMB Member Care team at (804) 620-3371 if returning missionaries seem to have needs that may necessitate professional direction and counsel.
- Be patient, recognizing “anyone who has served cross-culturally needs time to adjust.”

Among other budget information noted in the Q&A update:

- The one-time payout to personnel who accept the voluntary retirement incentive is estimated at \$23.1 million. In a November 2015 letter to trustees posted on the IMB website, President David Platt said that projection is based on the assumption 600 to 800 individuals will accept the offer.

No official total of personnel to accept the voluntary retirement incentive will be available before Dec. 11, the date after which individuals accepting the incentive cannot rescind their decisions.

- Personnel resigning as a result of the voluntary retirement incentive are expected to save the IMB \$38.6 million in 2016. Factoring in the one-time payout, net savings are estimated at \$15.5 million for 2016. A projected 2016 budget deficit of \$22.58 million is explained by one-time retirement

initiative costs and will be covered from reserve funds, the article states.

- Proceeds from property sales were not factored into the 2016 budget. Any such proceeds will be used to replenish and stabilize the organization's reserves. The IMB estimated its total 2015 financial reserves at \$168 million, according to the 2015 Cooperative Program ministry report it submitted to the SBC Executive Committee.

Lottie Moon Offering projections

For 2016, the IMB anticipated [Lottie Moon Christmas Offering](#) receipts based on a historical projection of the past four years. In the past, the IMB has projected Lottie Moon receipts equivalent to the previous year's offering goal, which at times has been higher than the amount received. For example, the 2015 *SBC Annual* listed 2015 and 2016 Lottie Moon income projections at \$175 million each—even though the 2014 offering totaled just over \$153 million, and the 2013 offering totaled just over \$154 million.

Platt told trustees in his letter projecting Lottie Moon income based on past receipts was a key factor in the 2016 budget.

“We have decided to project (Lottie Moon) giving based on an historical projection of the past four years of (offering) giving rather than setting it equal to our stretch goal,” Platt wrote. “We believe this better aligns our budgeted expenses with expected giving, while still leaving open the possibility that our actual (Lottie Moon) giving may be much higher. We have estimated (offering) giving of \$151.8 million (for 2016), which is \$23.2 million below our 2015 goal of \$175 million.”

The 2016 IMB operating budget of \$278,755,000 approved by trustees during their Nov. 5-6 meeting in New Orleans appeared to have been adjusted down by \$26 million from the 2016 ministry costs estimated in the 2015 *SBC Annual*.