

A Panel Discussion: **Furloughs and Home Assignments**

This is a transcription of a conversation between eight individuals about furloughs and home assignments: Doug, Sally, Jimmy and Christen, Jonathan, Todd, and Tina hosted by Amy Young about furloughs and home assignments.

Amy Young:

Well, welcome to those of you watching this. We're calling this our unofficial furlough campfire. Back in the day people at the end of the day would gather around a campfire and just have conversations, because you were sitting there. And in our modern era, especially cross-cultural workers, welcome to our campfire about furloughs and home assignments and all things. We got on this call about five minutes ago and did a brief introduction of the panelists. So the, the seven of us had never been in this space together. And, and within minutes, of course in our cross-cultural world, connections were made. The reason we're doing this campfire is that furloughs and home assignments and sabbaticals are a part of the cross-cultural world. And it's just helpful to hear from others. Often we only hear our own story or people from within our own organization. And it's so helpful to sit back and hear from other organizations and learn what they do.

And to hear from other people, what went well, what didn't go well, how can we all keep improving. Because this is a part of our life. It's a part that's necessary. It's also a part that can be very hard and it's also a part that can be very good. And so we're trying to figure out how can we maybe turn the hard down like two degrees and the good up two degrees. We know it's still going to be hard, but so welcome to Sally and Doug and Jonathan and Todd and Jimmy and Christen and Tina, we are so glad you're here. We pulled this group together, who have served around the world, served in a lot of organizations, served with kids, served without kids single done, a lot of different things from different home countries. So we so appreciate having you here. Thank you so much.

We're going to start off by going around and have everyone share what has been your furlough experience and how does your organization set it up? Is it every so, so many years? How long is it? Is it required when you're off the field? Are you required to do certain things? So just kind of paint the picture of what your sabbatical experience has been like. And I'm going to call on some of you since again, we don't know each other quite yet. And also I wanna say this is a conversation. So if something sparks in one of you and you want to ask clarifying questions, feel free to jump in. So how about Doug, if you go first, tell us a little bit about your furlough and home assignment, whatever your organization called it experiences.

Doug:



Yeah, it called it a bunch of different things. So we had a pretty flexible organization that we worked with, which was great when it came to health needs, educational needs, whatever it was a great part of our member care is to have that flexibility. One rule that when we started, we started in the early nineties with our organization. And one of the fast rules at that time was your first term had to be four years. And then you could have a home assignment. And that was wise because it caused you to not have a light at the end of the tunnel.

Amy:

Ah yep.

Doug:

And you engaged with the people that were there, you learned the language you buckled down and I hate to say this, but that was pre-internet. So we weren't connected with home that much. We wrote letters, which took, you know, three weeks to a month to get there. And then a reply was the same amount of time. So we were actually in the place 24 7 and I know today's world has changed a lot for the better for the worse, but I just wanna challenge people, try to try to hang in there the first term, at least engage, put some roots down, learn to love the people. And uh, yeah, you'll get there eventually, but uh, how

Amy:

Long was your first home assignment?

Doug:

It was a year.

Amy:

A year. Okay.

Doug:

Yeah. Which also worked out great because we could get our kids in school and stuff like that. So that, that was an advantage. So the way our organization works is you earn home assignment. Like you get three months per every year on the field. Okay. And so after four years you can have a year if you want it, you don't have to take a year. Okay. But, uh, there's some flexibility in that. So that worked out really good for us and you know, gave us a great bond with the people cuz we were there.

Amy:

Yeah. Uh, excellent. Well, great. Sally, how about you, what kind of your setup with your organization do you have?

Sally:

Yeah. Yeah. So it's, it's actually quite similar in the sense that for your first term. So for us, the first term is, uh, generally three years and, and we're also very much encouraged by the organization



to stay on the field for that three years. We're encouraged not to go back to our passport countries, but to actually be rooted, get, get those roots down in, in the places where we are. So it's, it's for us, it's two months, every year that we would get, uh, for our home assignments. So if we take three years on field, then we would go on a home assignment for around six months. But really after that first term, then it becomes a lot more flexible depending on the unit. So I've actually only done one home assignment and that was during 2020. So it was quite unique.

Amy:

Yes. Oh, good. Well thanks and that would be a unique home assignment. How about Todd? How about you?

Todd:

Yes. Uh, my organization's a little different than, uh, what the others two have described and part of it is, um, we focus on teaching. So we're teaching either universities or like high schools. Yeah. So we actually, there's two different things we do every year. We typically take, uh, two months off because we're not teaching. So that's a typical time for people to go back, uh, to their home countries. And that's, it's not really required, but it's in the, it's in the, uh, profile and your budget to do that. Most people do that and then the other thing they do is, uh, a home assignment. Um, and that's a little more flexible. Uh, it's not actually mandatory. It's suggested you do it once every four years. I have teammates that have like never taken one. I have some that, that have done it frequently. I've actually taken three of them. Um, two of them were scheduled and then one, the most recent one really was just because of COVID. I went on home assignment just because, well, I couldn't really stay in country very well.

Todd:

So that's how it works. It's, it's suggested you take one every four years. It's something that you actually work with your country director on to decide like when do I wanna take one? Um, you can take one earlier if you want to. Like I said, some people decide to wait five, six years and then the length of it can be anywhere from six months to a year and a half. A year and a half is a little bit long, that's you know, if something happens, you, you can extend it.

Todd:

But typically what people do is about six months to a year, but when they take, when they take the home assignment, um, and then once again, it's very flexible. There's not a lot of requirements as to what you do. Um, it's kind of up to you. Like when you wanna take it, what you want to do on the home assignment, do you want to focus on, you know, just relationship building fundraising? Um, do you just need to take a break? You know, what do you want to do is kind of up to you? So that's kind of the way it's structured

Amy:

And that's as others were talking, I was thinking that probably the type of work you're doing because I was in a similar situation tied to an academic year. And so there were certain points that



were easier to, to eddy out or eddy in and transition out and, and that really factored in so well, thank

Todd:

The yearly schedule makes it easy. Cause you, you end teaching and then there's really what, what are you doing? So it's a good time to transition out

Amy:

Well, and again, not to insert myself too much into the conversation, but similarly having been in an academic setting, the school provided housing and sometimes they made us leave because they used the housing for summer programs. So if you were having to travel two months anyways, to a certain extent, it did make sense for me to go back to the US for at least I'm not having to pay housing, staying in a hotel and eating out. I think a lot of, with the type of work you're doing, the housing situation, are you renting your own housing, so you have a slight bit of control or somebody else renting it and providing it so they can tell you, "You will be gone these two months" and you're like, okay, so yeah. Yeah. Excellent. Jimmy and Christen. Yes. Tina, go

Tina:

Ahead. Oh, sorry. I was just gonna say our kids attended public school, so we couldn't be gone more than two months in the summer, two and a half depend unless we wanted to change school systems. And so we were able to just go every two years for two months, my husband and me and the kids, two and a half, three, depending on their ages and then get back in time for school to start in our, in our country that we were living in. And so we did that successfully for 20 years. And so we never did longer than two and a half, three months at a time.

Amy:

Tina, that makes a great point. Because I know for other families as well, if their kids were in local schools, honestly, to take a year off of the field, then they would almost be opting to not be returning to local schools when they came back.

Tina:

Were very thankful to have a flexible organization. Yeah. That would allow us to do that.

Amy:

And I'm hoping I know organizations will be listening to this conversation. So that again, that, that could be an option when you do have kids of school age and you wanna keep the kids in school, plugged into the culture themselves and making local friends and just a part of the culture. Next week Global Trellis is doing a webinar about home assignments and kids and a big factor is schooling. I think that has to go in to our thinking about home assignments: schooling on the field and, and if, when you're off the field, how that factor's in for kids as well. So that's a great point. Thank you, Tina.



Tina:

And for tent makers so that you could keep your business running. Right. We couldn't leave our business for more time than that.

Amy:

Right. because then it also, you a, you can't leave your business and draw attention. Like, are you super wealthy? How can you just leave? Is this not a real business? How can you just pick up and leave and go when it's not a family emergency? I mean, I think every culture understands if suddenly your parents are having a medical emergency, they understand needing to be off the field. But if it's just like, oh, I'm just going for six months. Okay. To do what? "Well, you know, to connect to people." And they're like, well, that sounds lovely. Okay. <laugh> so it'd be nice to have that flexibility. Those are great points. Thank you, Tina. All right, Jimmy and Christen, how about you, what was kind of your experience with your organization?

Christen:

First of all, Doug and Sally, I feel like we might be lightweight, with you guys staying on the field for, four years before you went back. We've done the two year cycle, um, and our organization is also flexible and it's field based and just the way visa cycles here run. Most people on our teams do do every two years, uh, three months, every two years. So with some advice from leadership, when we came over, our kids were already a little older and um, still have strong connections in America. And so it was recommended to us that we went back more often, but for shorter periods of time and things like that. And we've also coordinated it with the school year. And so twice in our almost six years, they've done a semester in American school. And so, yeah, I think our kids have really, influenced our decision making, I guess, for, for those. Yeah.

Jimmy:

Yeah. The first time we went, we were, we went home in the spring semester, so we left January and then this last, most recent home assignment, we just got back from home assignment in May. I guess we were in the spring as well. So we stayed the whole, we stayed actually the, the full length of our time and our organization. We earned they've just changed the home assignment policy. But now it's eight days for every month served on the field. It used to be three, three months for every year ... they switched it so that people can have a little bit more even greater flexibility with that home assignment. We were actually told we couldn't go into the States during our first term. So we went to India for vacation because we weren't allowed to go back to the us, which was good. And speaks a little bit to what Doug was saying, you know, kind of getting entrenched in the culture and language and staying kind of focused and not getting distracted with, you know, home thoughts. So that was, that was helpful. It was frustrating, but it was also helpful.

Amy:

It's fun to just hear the variety, I'm enjoying this. All right. Jonathan, how about your setup?



Jonathan:

Yeah. World Venture, gives the same kind of, I think flexibility, but also has some requirements that are, I think, adjusted per individual situation. So they would like us to attend a debrief at the home office once every four years. And depending on the situation of each family on the field, obviously that's different if you're a family with kids in school and the, this, you know, the school year in your country, um, is sometimes at different times of the year. Um, so I have found for me serving single, overseas, I found that a ratio of three months on home assignment in the summer <laugh> and then two years on the field. I typically trade a June, July, August are my home assignment months because it's monsoon season in Myanmar and it's the summer in Minnesota. And I don't like the cold and it just works out to get to see family once every two years, that was interrupted a little bit with, the you know, with the big, pandemic a couple years ago.

Jonathan:

And, and particularly this year, I've had to take some extended time on home assignment for some rest and soul care because of the extremely difficult situation in Myanmar in the last year with the military coup. So, the rhythm that I've been in preceding this in the last decade has been interrupted a little bit, but what I love about my organization is the flexibility and that as a field run organization, the relationship with each of their members is so strong that they just, we just kind of negotiate it and talk about what what's working. And I think one of the hardest things in, in my organization that I've noticed among other personnel is not so much taking home assignment too often or spending too long in the their passport country, but it's getting back on home assignment. It's actually, we have a lot of people who they've passed that four year mark and they still haven't attended a debrief. Um, <laugh>, I don't know if just life on the field is, so much, you know, we're so embracing our calling that we just don't wanna come back to the States, but, um, that seems to be the bigger problem in our organization.

Amy:

Thanks, Jonathan. And it's interesting again, to hear the different factors of like, was there military coup, and, were your kids older when you went to the field, were they younger? And so they totally, 100% grew up in that culture. Thus staying very rooted to the school there. These are really good factors to bring out. And that's why I think a conversation is so important as opposed to just "Here are 10 best tips," which misses the nuance or throws down the hammer of "here's how it should be." Flexibility's gotta be factored in a little bit because we aren't machines. We are each of us humans with slightly different setups, slightly different needs and then factoring then factoring all of this in. So I, I think this is important to tease it out in a conversation. This is why I loved bringing this group together, to have the variety. I do know for some organizations where it is like four year on the field and then a year in the states, that's kind of a totally different setup preparing for a furlough and a home assignment. And, and especially when you've got kids and medical things factoring and then all of that. So how have different of you prepared for furlough or home assignment what's worked for you, what didn't work and like you do it differently. So how have you kind of prepared for furloughs and you all now have everyone has spoken? So popcorn jump in.



Jonathan:

I find one of the biggest challenges for me in preparing for a home assignment is the mental preparation. And in the months before leading to a home assignment, I go through like a phase where like, I don't want to leave the field. I don't, you know, I have to like wrap things up and, trying to get of things, order organized so that when I'm on the field, cuz I'll get a lot of questions and I'm sure you all can relate when you're on home assignment, people will come up to you and be like, oh, isn't it good to be home where you can finally rest away from the stress of life on the field. And actually it's more stressful. The reverse culture shock is so much, there's so many more obligations on my shoulders, on a home assignment. So I find it's good for the months preceding the home assignment to actually spend some time preparing; preparing a little video that I'm gonna show people actually preparing, thinking through what am I gonna give my supporters, having those all organized and even starting to send some emails out, getting some things on the calendar.

Jonathan:

So when I land in the United States, I already have kind of a plan to run forward with. Otherwise it just gets too overwhelming and, a little bit too stressful. So that mental preparation for me is really important preceding a home assignment.

Amy:

Oh, that is good. I I'm taking notes because in part also what we'd like to do at Global Trellis is build out a whole curriculum for home assignment: as you're preparing for it, these are things to do as you're on it, as you're returning back to the field. Jenilee wrote an article called "18 Things to Think about Preparing for Furlough" and we've made a worksheet to go with it. So that then as someone's going through the article, they can be taking notes. Because there are just so many things to think about. And now of course you're adding things, Jonathan, that weren't even on there, which is fine, but to go, "Okay, it is good just to have a space to think about these things."

Amy:

If someone says to me, think about it, like, I don't know how you guys are, but I'm like, okay, I don't even know what to think. And I'm thinking about it. I am thinking about it. I am thinking about thinking about things and now, and it's not productive thinking, but if I have, an article that says, "Here are 18 things. Think about this, think about this, think about this." Then I actually can think about them and get prepared. So I, I appreciate Jonathan that you said preparing for it often starts mentally and getting your mind around it. Yeah. Others of you, how have you, what has worked for you preparing for a furlough or a home assignment?

Jimmy:

We, so our organization has, I guess they used to call it furlough and now they call it home assignment. And I like assignments. I don't do low unstructured time. So six months of rest makes me wanna like, like freak out, you know, like what am I gonna do for six months? Like I can do like a two week vacation. And after that I'm like, what am I doing? So we worked in mobilization eight years before we joined staff overseas. And so we do a lot of mobilization when we're home. We



were involved really heavily in the perspectives on the World Christian movement. So this last home assignment, Christen and I taught 14 Perspectives Classes. And so I spent probably probably six or eight months before we left. I was engaging with that community again to see if there was a way we could get on different class rosters, if we could go and share at their perspectives events, you know, to share about the work that we're doing as a way to mobilize specifically for Bosnia.

Jimmy:

Um, but that was an effort that gave me a little bit of connection to kind of like this idea that this is actually an assignment. We're actually doing something we're not just, you know, twiddling our thumbs for six months, but we actually still own a house in the States. And so we spent a lot of time preparing home improvement projects, you know, replacing different things, getting different things done before we arrived. And I think for us, that's been actually having that house for our children has actually been a really a beneficial thing. I'm not saying that that would work for everyone. Uh, but we actually go back to that house when we are on home assignment. So it's not the kids forever home that they've known forever, but it is like an anchor for them. They know that they know the neighborhood, they have kids in the neighborhood and actually our home assignment has been really restful.

Jimmy:

I mean, we do a lot when we're on home assignment. Um, but we're not living out of a suitcase. Like we go, we land at the airport and we go back to that house. There's no confusing in between. And I could definitely see for some, for others, not having like a place where they're like, you know, anchored and can be long term, that that's been a huge difference for us cuz even some recent, um, some colleagues have done that recently home assignment and their home assignment was a train wreck and you know, they were bopping around house to house trying to figure out their living situation. And that was really stressful. Um, you know, you can't really rest when you're having, having to do that. So

Christen:

Like Jimmy said, it wasn't like a forever house that the kids grew up in, we bought a rental house like right before we left and stayed in it a couple of months before we left. And then because we do these two year cycles, we just have people do a two year lease. And so then we stay there for a little bit and then we rent it out again. And like Jimmy said, that has been very anchoring for our kids and restful for us to have our own space. And uh, one last thing Jimmy reminded me. We did mobilization and training before and so we do a lot with like, um, college students for eight weeks or something like that. And there's a tool that we use with those groups before they leave called raft, R A F T, it's a really good tool and we've done that with our children and with us. And I really like the structure of that also. I don't know if you're gonna share about that. So

Amy:

I've heard of the raft. That's a really good tool. Yeah.



Christen:

So if people are watching, you can just Google it and it is good.

Amy:

Excellent. Others. What have you done to prepare and what's kind of worked or what didn't work?

Sally:

I think for me actually, it's more something that didn't work so well. <laugh> what I realize now, as I think about my preparing for home assignment next year, is that really, for those first three years, I hardly connected in with, with my sending churches and, with those, with those supporters, I sent out newsletters, but I really didn't connect in with the pastors so much. And so I found that when I came back after three years, I was doing a lot of just trying to reconnect and just trying to get people up to up to where, where I was at. So coming back to the field, I don't wanna spend all my time communicating with people back in my passport country, but I've recognized that there is a, there is a responsibility and there is a need really to, to keep people, to keep people in the fold and to help them to understand where we are at. So I've, I've now every six months or so. I send an individualized letter to—I've got maybe 16 churches that support me. And so I write an individualized letter to each of them. It all has the same content in there, but it's, it's got the individual's names written and, and I've, I feel like that's just a good way of, of intentionally keeping in contact with them. Uh, so hopefully the next time I go back, it's not going to be going back three years, but actually we're connected when we're connected this time.

Amy:

Oh, that's a good point. And again, it's just highlighting, there are so many factors. We do need to think about our kids. We do need to think about like what's going on in our country. Is there a coup? That we do need to think about those who have sent us and staying connected. So again, I'm not trying to overwhelm, but I think it's good to just, it's like balls that we're juggling. That if you just remember it and if you kind of build a system around it, it's a little bit easier than all of a sudden when you're going back. realizing, "Oh, I don't really have relationships. So I'm sort of starting from ground zero." Building up takes a lot more energy than maintaining. Um, mm-hmm <affirmative> as, as you're talking about that, Sally. Yeah. Yeah.

Tina:

One thing that helped us was when we, I, I guess I would say know your kids know your family. So we, did four weeks at my parents' house and visiting supporters that were my supporters before we married. And then we do four weeks at my husband's parents' house and seeing his supporters from before we were married. And my daughter, when she was one whined and held onto my leg for the first three weeks at my parents' house. And she was only happy for one week there. And then she was very happy for four weeks at my in-law's house. And that wasn't fair to my parents.

Amy:

Oh, that's hard.



Tina:

So we changed it. So I would go back to the US early and the girls, the kids would, would adjust to different place. And so we had more time at my parents, but it was more adjustment time for them. And then later on building in dead days when we weren't spending the night at someone else's house in big trips, like being one night as a family at a hotel that really helped with older kids so that we knew there was a break where we could just be,

Amy:

Oh, those are some really great tips. Know your kids and, and build in, what's gonna help them be successful. I love that, Tina. Thank you, Doug. Did you have anything you wanted to add? And if not, that's fine. But I just,

Doug:

I think, uh, for us, we tried to kind of schedule out our home assignment, no matter how long it was. Generally, we tried to load the front end of things, tried to get the church visits and the meeting with individual supporters done early. Uh, Sally, I think, uh, as I heard you talk, I was thinking about partnership and connecting with those partners and making sure we bring 'em along on the journey. And that involves, uh, the times when we're not in our home country. And also when we are in the home country to update 'em and keep that partnership going. So we loaded the front end heavy with our visits and such; another thing I would say is schedule downtime, a vacation or whatever, schedule it. And don't waiver because there are so many things that, that will come in and then the closer you get to going back to your, your country, the more people will say, oh, we haven't got together yet. And, uh, yeah, I see all you laughing. You've been

Amy:

Yep! We know (laughter). Yep.

Doug:

So, you know, if you can try to load things earlier on and when those people say, Hey, we still need to get together. I say, well, you know, we had that one chance and I don't know if we'll have time or not. Those are hard, but, uh, that's what we tried to do.

Amy:

Yeah. It is interesting. I think it doesn't matter how long you've been on the field that last week, when you're back in your passport country, the pattern is the same and you, you just come to expect everyone's gonna come outta the woodwork and how do you yep. How do you handle that? Um,

Tina:

That reminded me also doctors and dentist visits; Try to do them in the first week or the second week, because I've twice had my mammogram results come back bad, really late. Right. So early on doctor visits...



Amy:

<laugh> That's a good, that is a good point. Yeah. Cause it is so stressful to try and get some of that doctor stuff done that last week when something's coming up. Yeah.

Jonathan:

Can I, can I add to that? Tina, that's a great point. One of the things that our organization really recommends is having medical checkups on the field. Um, so living in Southeast Asia, um, a place like Bangkok has wonderful medical facilities and much cheaper and high-quality healthcare. Um, and so actually I've scheduled my home assignments to have a, a couple weeks in Thailand before coming back to the states where I get all my medical stuff done in Thailand, in the region first, before coming, and then it's already checked off before I even start my time in the us. And it's awesome because it's cheaper too. <laugh>

Jimmy:

Um, I was gonna add on the medical stuff, uh, our organization, we have medical insurance, through organizations international, and they've actually changed now where they pay a hundred percent of stuff done overseas. Cause healthcare in the States is so expensive. Um, I would recommend that when you do go back for anything medical with your doctor, because healthcare in the US especially changes so much. Um, we were confronted with a huge out of pocket costs that we were kind of like, wait, how did this happen? Because our doctor changed networks. And so we had, we known that and been kind of like on the grid for five and a half years before we would've known that and been privy to that information. So when you go back, just make sure you check that your doctor is in network. Uh, so you're not scared with the large bill when you, when you do all those health checkups,

Amy:

That's a good thing. As you were talking about that, Jimmy, I don't and probably many of you are similar to this. I don't really pay attention to that kind of detail when my organization would send those kind of emails out, they were good about communicating with me. So again, this is not a slam like "organizations should communicate better" . . . organizations, I think do a very good job. It's just, if you haven't been ill or like, that's not like that current isn't a felt need for you, then you sort of ignore it. Um, and so that might be just helpful if you are that kind of person, is there someone you could call in your home office or somewhere in your organization who reads all of those documents? I, one of my sisters is great with detail. So it's always, if I, if there's something with instruction manual, she says, please let me read the instruction manual before you even touch it.

Amy:

Cause I'm always like if I can't figure it out myself, this is stupid. So like, let me just get in there and get playing around. This is just my personality. So if you are that kind of personality, find someone with a different personality who reads the emails, who can tell you what has changed maybe with retirement fund with your organization or with medical stuff in your home country. Or like, if that,



if that level of detail is not your strong point, assume something has changed and maybe your doc like the whole networks or this thing. And, and so to ask someone who's really good with details. That is great, cause I forget that I'm not good with details until I get, get hit with a really big bill. And then you're like, wait, what? And then I remember, okay, that, that as much as I wanna blame someone else, that one is more on me <laugh> than I would like for it to be. Yeah. Tina, you said you had some, or previously, you had mentioned that you had some home assignments that were, or furloughs that were not the greatest, what were, what made them kind of, not the greatest and what did you learn from them?

Tina:

Yeah, I appreciated Jimmy saying that he couldn't go and do nothing and that that's the most horrible thing that he could think of because my husband hates HMA. He hates it. Um, it's being for him, it's being unemployed for, for that many weeks. And, um, people have actually said to him, even when our kids were young, if he took the kids to the park on a weekday, you know, people have looked at him and said, what is your job? And because one person said that, then he felt like that every time someone looked at him that he was unemployed and not a real man or yeah. So, um, yeah, that's one thing that is, that is tough for us. Um, he loves being where we live in North Africa and um, yeah. Um, I think also moving around from place to place, to place to place, like you guys mentioned earlier, housing is important and having your schedule is important and yeah, it got better over the years, but it hasn't always been our favorite thing. <laugh>

Jimmy:

This wasn't our case, Amy, but, um, like people that we know, like I think they're afraid to spend money on home assignment. So almost give yourself permission, uh, where we live. So we don't live in a third world country, but we live in a second world country and it's probably one of the more economical and thrifty, uh, cheaper countries in Europe. But like the prices in America, it was a shock for us when we got back to the States, uh, this last home assignment, like how much stuff cost. And I think part of that is cuz we've been here five and a half years. We're used to being able to go out, to eat for a family, five costing like \$15, you know? And so, um, we went to America and we went to Chili's for the first time. It was \$80.

Jimmy:

I like about had a heart attack, you know, but giving yourself permission to lose money or spend money or kind of for money to kind of be more loose in terms of like its attachment to you. Um, but also our friends, they were telling us about how terrible their home assignment was. And it was like they were, they were trying to stay in this house that was designed for them and their three kids and their parents, but it was a two-bedroom house or something. It was just not conducive for their duration of their home stay. So just get, you know, get an apartment or, or spend some money, get into a place that's like gonna meet your physical, mental and emotional needs. Don't try to squeeze yourself into something that's gonna fit with your budget. You're not doing this for the rest of your life. Give yourself permission to spend, you know, \$2,000 on rent or something like that. If you're going back to a really expensive part of the country, mm-hmm



<affirmative>, I don't feel you have to be like live in the closet, you know, in their in-laws bedroom, um, for your duration of your home stay.

Tina:

Absolutely. And to have that conversation with your in-laws I would say as well. Right? It was actually a relief to them when we weren't gonna stay with them. We thought they were gonna be so upset. Right. But yeah. Direct conversations with people.

Todd:

Yeah. I was gonna add, Jimmy, that comment about money. I hadn't thought about that, but that's, that's a good, um, comment and something that my organization did, was one of the things we were encouraged to do was just think about how much is it gonna cost you to go back for the summer? And to actually build that into our profiles, some of that, cost, um, because like you're saying, it, it, it is more expensive a lot of times. But that was one of the things we were encouraged to do was build that into our profiles and, and think about, you know, do you need need housing when you're there? And, and how much is that gonna cost? How can you build that in? So that you're not shocked by, like you said, how much it costs to travel or something like that.

Jonathan:

Amy I'm reminded of the, of what you shared on the Sabbatical Journey Course just about how we all pay, but it's just a matter of what currency we pay in. And if we're not paying with money, we're paying with effort or we're paying, um, with time or we're paying with relationships, but to think through the cost of home assignment, I like that sometimes it's better just to say, you know what, I'm gonna pay more with money cuz I don't wanna pay against these relationships or with, you know, your mental health or something like that.

Amy:

When I had that aha, that currency is not just money. And so then to figure out like when I'm in America, I use US dollars when I'm in this country, I use this type of currency when I'm in and, and to go, oh, I, we have a whole variety of currencies as well. When should I pay in emotional currency? When should I pay in relational? When should I pay in time? It is better to spend eight hours doing this da, da, da, da. And when is it better to pay in money and thinking through those things. Um, and for those of you listening and I would imagine there's some flexibility. Um, and so even if your organization has a wonderful setup and I think there are most organizations really care about their people and are trying to have good setups, but also taking some of our own personal responsibility.

Amy:

And so if your organization doesn't have a line item where you're raising every month, some money for home assignment to begin, like have a line item in your mind or in your budget about home assignments and to start saving money to set aside so that when you are on home assignment, you do have, or furlough, you do have a few more options on housing or on going out



to eat or, or just some of this, Jimmy, I love how you said mental. And again, it comes back to what you said, Jonathan. I think a lot of this also is mentally, am I mentally prepared to pay \$80 for what, in my mind, I should be paying 15 and it's hard. Like we can all laugh about it, but, but to go, okay, a lot of this is also mental and so like, "God help help my mind as well." Um, and I had another point that left my mind. So that's very humorous that I'm talking about the mind and my point flew away and I'm trying to fill the time. So it'll fly back and it's not flying back. So we'll move on and see if it flies back.

Sally:

I was gonna add as well as a single person. It can be very easy to think, uh, that you will save money and it'll be great to just stay with your family member or a friend. And, um, I really like what you say about paying in different currencies, because the reality is you might be saving money by staying in a house with a family member or a friend, but to don't deny yourself that space, if you are a single person to, to have that space, to be able to invite people into your, into your home for, for those six months on home assignment. And, um, yeah, I think that that's really important and uh, a really special thing that you can be doing while you're on home assignment is to, to be hosting people as well. So I feel maybe especially as a single person, it was so easy for me to want to just stay with other people. But actually when I got my own space, uh, I think I gained a lot in, in being able to host others.

Amy:

That's a good point. Yeah. And I didn't intend for this call to be like a plug for the Sabbatical Journey Course, but it was interesting, Tina, when you were talking about like your husband and even Jimmy, like I need an assignment. Um, one of the advantages people have said of taking the Sabbatical Journey Course is say like, when someone is like, well, what are you doing? To be able to say, well, "I'm taking a course" and even we all know those of us who've done this sabbatical during course it's very flexible, so it can be more, or it can be less. Um, but to have something to do. And then even to within that, like one of the quarters is on Reequipping. So are there some courses you could be taking while you're off the field? Are there some things you could be learning?

Amy:

Um, and, and I think that comes back to Tina, as you were saying, know, know the personalities of your children. And I think also know yourself, know yourself, are you the kind of person? Is it recharging to have a lot of space or even as, um, as Jonathan was saying, maybe know what you've been coming out of that, not every home assignment's gonna be exactly the same. Maybe one you've had a term that was not that exhausting or that traumatic compared to others. And then you have one where a coup has occurred and life has been so different. And so you might need a different, so also understand, understand yourself and, and stage of life. We haven't talked about that too much, but when I was younger, furloughs, time off the field looked quite different than when I was older and maybe family members were having medical situations as my father broke his hip eight days before I returned to the States and it was quite a serious break. And then



even during the surgery to replace it, they broke more bones because of other medical situations. So again it was my, my father's own medical reality.

Amy:

That was a very different time than I was expecting. Cause I was spending a lot more time than I would have at a younger age. And, and so again, just stage of life factors into this as well for yourself and for family members, let's end on some questions about supporters and supporting churches. What are things that have gone really well with supporters and supporting churches and what are things, uh, what suggestions do you have for people going on to home assignments and going on to furloughs with supporters and supporting fellowships?

Jonathan:

One of the things that I've set up, through my whole missionary journey is having kind of a support prayer team that prays for me weekly. And I, I prep a little prayer paragraph every week that I post and it goes out and they pray on conference call every week. So I try to meet with these core prayer, this core prayer team when I'm back. And one of the cool things that one of my favorite things that I did one time is I went through all of my prayer updates from the previous couple years and all the things that I asked for prayer for, and I wrote a little sentence of how that prayer had been answered. And then what I did is I cut them out, putting it out on paper and had them draw them out of baskets. And we just had a time of prayer, praise and celebration, and they would take one of those prayer requests that they had seen in the previous two years, uh, remind what the prayer was and then praise God for how it had been answered. And it was a real cool way to kind of celebrate with my prayer team that their prayers were effective and they were a part of something huge

Amy:

Jonathan, that's fantastic. And I see lots of like thumbs up and smiles, and I think that is gonna live on in a lot of people watching this to, to take that on or adapt that. That's fantastic. Thank you.

Tina:

This is kind of an opposite thing, but, sometimes the best thing has been me saying no.

Amy:

Hmm.

Tina:

I, I can't, we, our family can't drive three hours to see you. I'm sorry, but we just can't this time. But I'm happy to talk to you on the phone or my husband, my husband's better on the phone than me, but yeah, that kind of thing. Or just saying sometimes just my husband going really, right? And not us, us staying and having, having a stable bedtime right. Or whatever it was for the kids. Sometimes that was the most important thing. And sometimes I didn't say no, and I really



regretted it later because I didn't get to spend time with the people that were the most meaningful to me because I was pleasing the other people.

Christen:

Yeah. I was gonna echo that with, knowing your kids, knowing the season, know all of that. Our first furlough, the kids did a lot with us. But the second furlough, I mean, they're all teenagers and they wanna be with their friends. And so we really tried as much as possible to not drag them to every supporter's house, to every church, every whatever. And I think they were really grateful for that. And then also, um, yeah, I think it is best when Jimmy and I can both go together when we're meeting with supporters, but there were a lot of times this time where we split up and I appreciated the freedom to do that.

Jimmy:

I think it's helpful too, to kind of, I, I'm more saying this to myself and other, other, like, you know, Enneagram ones who wanna do home assignment perfectly. Uh, and so, uh, you know, I, I was, I was thinking on our first time assignment, it was like, we gotta, we gotta meet with a hundred percent of our supporters and donors, you know, at this time I was like, okay, let's try to meet with, you know, 80%, which I think was still way too high <laugh> uh, we have, I think about 109 donors and we don't have a lot of churches or we didn't, we actually picked up several churches on this last home assignment. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. But you know, like some people just aren't or some people don't wanna meet, you know, it's and I think for me, like I had to really, I, I really fought that on this home assignment, I really had to fight this, you know, well, you're giving me a hundred dollars a month, you know, shouldn't you be interested in what we're doing.

Jimmy:

You've been doing, you've been giving to our work for 13 years. Like, why aren't you interested in meeting with us? But it was they don't, they don't need that. You know? And, you know, I had to, I had to like kind of reorient myself to like what, you know, being, being one, I'm not gonna meet with every donor. And then two, some donors don't wanna meet with us and that's not a, that's not a slam on us. Like we're not important or we don't have value or we're not worth it. It's just that they, they feel comfortable with their money going to something and reading our updates or not reading our updates, you know? And I think, uh, just kind of like being really, yeah, just loose. Like what is that? Uh, acceptance, acceptance. *Acceptance* is my word for 2022

Amy:

<laugh>. I love it. What's that word?

Amy:

Acceptance. <laugh>

Jimmy:



Yeah. Like just acceptance with the fact that what is, is, and that's what, the way it's gonna be. And, and I, I can't, you know, make things happen. Like we, there was one particular church we tried, I think we called in like 13 times or something, you know,

Christen:

I think they're actually our biggest donors biggest. So they did not have the admin game on. They literally never got together with us. So,

Jimmy:

Yeah. So just letting go and just trusting that it's all gonna, it's all gonna work out. You know,

Jonathan:

Jimmy, I really resonate with that and I feel like it brings back something. My aunt actually told me, she and her family served in Congo, and were had to evacuate from, uh, in 1991. Anyway, they, they told me how they said, trust your supporters have grace for your supporters, cuz they, they pay you to be, not to do so, you know, they'll, they'll be with you even if you don't get a chance to meet with them, even if they don't hear all your stories and then kind of, you know, affirmation of that. My organization, my boss told me, he said, um, especially in light of everything that had happened in this last year in Myanmar, he said, prepare two responses for your supporters: prepare a five minute version and a 30 minute version. And he says, depending on who your supporters are and depending on their capacity for hearing your experiences; they may only want the five minute version and be okay with that. And then they're talking about their own thing and you know, let it be. But then he said, there will be your few supporters that will want the 30 minute version where you are emotional and you tell them the details and you tell them the full story. And that was good for me to just know that I'm gonna get both supporters and all of my supporters are important and special to me, even if they're the five minute version supporter or the 30 minute version supporter,

Tina:

We've got some 15 second ones too.

Amy:

That's true (laugh)

Todd:

Yeah. I wanted to follow up on, on those two comments too, because I think for me that's one of the things that, um, I have found, I don't have a lot of churches supporting me really only one, but it's mostly individuals. Um, and it's not that many, but the challenge I face is that they're strew across the country. So they're like really in three different locations. And I remember one summer I came home. I had been a while since I talked with a lot of 'em and I wanted to try to visit all of 'em and it just, it was too much travel. Um, and like, like some of you have said it, I found it better to say, okay, this summer I'm just gonna visit this group. And even when I'm in say like I've got



people that I visit in Atlanta, even when I'm there realizing, okay, I may have 10, 15 people that I wanna meet here, but I'm not gonna be able to do that.

Todd:

And even saying like, I'm gonna contact all 15 and see who gets in touch with me. Um, because I've done that a couple times. And like, one of you was saying, there's someone you've contacted for, you know, a dozen times and they haven't responded. I've actually had people that all of a sudden come out of the woodwork and say, "Hey, let's get together." Um, <laugh> so, you know, it, it goes both ways, just being, I think being flexible and saying, I can't meet with everybody and I'm, I'm just gonna throw the net wide and see who wants to meet. But yeah, like, like just kind of keeping your expectations low and even, I mean, I, I would even say like when I'm home in the summer only trying to meet with maybe even half of my supporters or, or less, um, because you just can't meet with everybody, but then next summer say, okay, I, I met with this group last summer, I'm meeting with this group this summer. So, you know, it goes back to some of that, that planning that a lot of people have talked about earlier, too,

Sally:

I found really helpful is that I organized maybe two weeks before I left, I organized a big event. I just at, just at a park where I invited as many people as I could. And I knew I wasn't gonna be able to chat to everybody, but I knew they could chat to each other. And it was just a very casual event where people brought lunch and everybody just mingled together. And then, and then for me, I, that was my boundary. I said to myself and I said to my friends there and supporters there that this was the last time, maybe it was a week before I left. This is the last time I'm going to see you. And then that week leading up to me, hopping on the plane was just designated for my family. So I found that to be really helpful, uh, just to kind of put a line in the sand and for everybody to know for me to, to actually articulate those, those boundaries I think was really, was really helpful because then people knew that, okay, she's not free that last week.

Sally:

So yeah, the, the other thing I wanted to share was, as visiting different churches as a, as a single person, I think it can sometimes feel a bit overwhelming when you are speaking. And then you have lots of people coming up to you afterwards. And I found what was really helpful for me was to actually have a friend come and join me. And I would choose a different friend each time. Uh, and it gave me an opportunity to when we are driving together to catch up with that friend, we then get a shared experience together as we're in this church setting, as we probably all know, depending on where we're sharing or how we're sharing. Um, sometimes it can be embarrassing. Sometimes it can be great. So there's highs and lows. As we, as we go about this sharing our journeys in front of large groups of people and to have somebody else there with me who was my advocate and who was, uh, who was also going to be somebody else who people could talk to as well. I found that really helpful. And I also found that it, it meant extra time getting to, to spend with those people who I really value in my life. And, um, so I really, I really appreciated that my



friends were keen to join me on that. And I think that's something that I'll be doing next time as well.

Amy:

Sally, I love that. And I'm even thinking, I realize with house or vehicles, it might not work, but with families like to, you could invite a couple friend too, to come and share and that they could go along and see, what is it like to go and speak at a church? What is it like to have this experience? And then that shared experience them, sorry, the wind is blowing here and the doors keep banging. So that's fantastic. Well, as our time is drawing to an end and the embers on our campfire are closing down. Well, we'll have to have some more of these because I've got a load of notes and I'm gonna create some resources or just to tease it out. Because I think these are just helpful suggestions. But two of my big takeaways from our conversation from all of you are the importance of having a plan, going into something, having a plan, thinking through, um, children's education, or where am I going to stay the importance of having a plan and the importance of lowering expectations.

Amy:

<laugh> Maybe not meeting with everybody, not having all of the experiences. So I think those two going together will help. And then just, it all comes back to doesn't it walking with the Spirit? What is the Spirit, what is God leading you to say yes to? And what is God leading you to say, that's not yours for right now. That's not yours for this home assignment that that person doesn't need to know this information this person does. So just all of that, having a plan, lowering expectations, and walking with the spirit. Well, Sally, Doug, Christen, Jimmy, Todd, Jonathan, Tina, thank you so much on behalf of the many who will be watching this video for the time you have invested in the global community to have better or good, just to keep growing that we're all keep growing in our cross-cultural life. And this is a part of it having home assignments and furloughs. So growing in that, thank you all so much.

Tina:

Have a great day Amy. Yeah.

Christen:

You're welcome.

Sally:

Thanks for organizing this. Yeah, mm-hmm <affirmative>.