

## **The Special Role Children Play in Supporting Missionary Parents LAM missionary “finishers” grateful to kids**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg  
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A phenomenon particular to the past 15 years has been an increasing number of “mature” adults (those over 50) who have chosen to end their professional careers and begin service as missionaries.

Commonly known as “Finishers,” this group of experienced professionals has decided that having climbed the career ladders, sent their children off to college and achieved many of the goals of their lives, they feel called by the Lord to contribute their experience and wisdom to God’s kingdom through full-time missionary service prior to retirement.

Many mission agencies have developed special programs to attract this demographic group. Southern Baptists call their program “Masters—Second Career folks on Mission with God.” The Masters program differs from normal career service in that candidates commit only to two or three years of service at a minimum, do not have to meet educational requirements, and attend a three-day orientation program, as opposed to up to eight or nine weeks of pre-field training.

Other missions, such as LAM, work closely with people in this group to place them in appropriate ministries where they can serve and yet still meet family obligations and responsibilities back home.

While younger missionaries who commit to overseas service often seek parental and sibling support to fulfill their call, Finishers must deal with the dual or triple dynamic of leaving behind aging parents, children and often grandchildren as well.

That separation, especially from children and grandchildren, can be wrenching. Yet children can actually help build a home-based supporting team and they themselves often become part of that sending team.

“We have greatly appreciated our son Peter’s efforts at support-raising for us,” reported Shelley Rice, an LAM missionary serving with her husband Craig in Costa Rica. “Last fall, we sent emails to many people, including Peter, a college junior, asking them to consider increasing their support of our ministry. Peter sent emails to many of his friends asking them to consider supporting us. At least four of his friends have supported us financially, and many have prayed for us.”

### **Crucial support**

Having the support of grown children is important to the success of any later-in-life missionaries who, contrary to our society’s pattern where children leave the nest, pack up and take the children’s nest with them and to some extent their security. Our own son, after we had left for missionary service in Ecuador while he was a sophomore in college, once remarked that one day it suddenly occurred to him that he no longer had a home to go to on vacation.

Chuck and Carol Morton, former LAM missionaries who entered service in their 50s, reported on their struggle with leaving children behind. “It’s one thing applying to become missionaries. It’s quite another actually receiving the call and having to make the decision to give up two high-paying jobs, a comfortable lifestyle and consider moving far away from one’s children and grandchildren. It was especially difficult for Carol because of having to move away from the children and grandchildren.

“But, we both came to the conclusion that if this was what God wanted us to do (and we both felt this), then it was what we must do and that He would provide for our needs and deal with our feelings regarding leaving and missing our family,” Chuck continued.

#### Painful departure

When my wife, Polly, and I sought out missionary service in our late 40s, we also faced the same dilemma and stresses. Writing about it in a book several years after we entered missionary service, I reflected: Our departure “was perfect timing as far as our family was concerned. Perfect in the Lord’s sight, but nonetheless painful for us. Beth (our daughter) was 22 years old and living on her own when we left. Atlanta was a long way from Louisville, but telephone calls were easier within the country and mail quicker (than from Ecuador). Brian (our son) was 20, and a sophomore at Eckerd College in Florida. No one could be more proud or more confident of their children than we are. What two absolutely fine human beings they are. We say that not to take credit for what they have become, but to give thanks to the Lord for blessing us with such fine children. Deciding to leave them behind and go off to another land was very difficult.

“It could not have been done with all children. We knew, however, that Beth and Brian were responsible individuals and ready to be on their own. We knew they could make it without their parents standing by—in fact at their age they would just as soon make it on their own. But parents never give up the responsibility of being parents even when the job is done.

“So, the time came to tell Beth and Brian that we had applied. We know it was not easy for them. They made it so much easier for us by giving us their blessing and saying they knew that we had wanted to do this for some time. I doubt they or anyone will ever know the tears we shed as we left and the pain we have felt many times since.

“How often I have struggled with Matthew 10:37-39: ‘Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’

“The Lord gave Beth and Brian to us as gifts. As with all children, that gift is temporary. The time comes when they move on to live their own lives according to what God’s will is for them. Of course, parents always love them (and unfortunately aren’t always good at giving up the parental role). We know that raising them and giving them to the Lord is part of the task we have been given. So, we moved on, trusting them to the Lord’s care, knowing we would see them as often as possible, and would always be available to them if they needed us.” (*From Don’t Rush*

*the Lord; A Pilgrimage to God's Purpose by Kenneth D. MacHarg, © 1997, William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, pages 16-18.)*

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at [info@lam.org](mailto:info@lam.org), or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission's web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM's Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

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