

(Photocopy and give to your family and friends)

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATING TO CHRISTIAN WORKERS OVERSEAS

1. In some countries, most mail entering and leaving is routinely read, in spite of official denial. Nothing is "censored" out of letters - in some areas, much mail just never arrives. It is good to number letters, e.g., "This is my third letter to you since Christmas." Note that typed letters arrive more easily than handwritten letters.
2. Unless you and your friend both use secure email, assume that all email sent to your friend will be officially scanned for religious and political content. Secure email means that your message content is encrypted. This requires special software or an email account with SSL encryption. Sending unencrypted messages will jeopardize your friend's work on the field. Realize that although you may be able to send your email securely, your friend may not have a secure connection on the other end. For secure communication, you must follow the specific email instructions provided by your friend.
3. Be aware that all phone conversations have the potential of being recorded; this includes VoIP (Skype, MSN, Yahoo Messenger) calls and chats. In some countries, these are recorded. Be very careful what you say and the expressions you use.
4. Feel free to write about your personal life and to share about your everyday affairs. Ask about your friend's job, studies, living conditions, lifestyle, sightseeing, vacations, etc. You **can** share how God is working in your life as an expression of your personal faith.
5. Be POSITIVE and uplifting, responding to some items in your friend's letters that will show you have prayerfully read them.
6. AVOID "I'm praying for you; "SUBSTITUTE "thinking about you, remembering you."
7. Topics to AVOID: politics, support or money gifts other than for birthdays or Christmas, foreigners' rights, negative comments. DO NOT MENTION "newsletters," "prayer letters" or the word "missionary".
8. The following may be sent directly (and as frequently as possible): cancelled stamps (limited to 200); picture postcards to show American scenery; birthday, Easter, Valentine's, Thanksgiving, and Christmas cards. Don't use colored envelopes. When sending pictures or other attachments via email, be careful about the file sizes, as your friend may not have adequate Internet connections to handle large attachments.
9. In NO way imply that the person is in this country as a missionary or "for the Lord" or is in any way connected with any Christian organization. Do not ask about giving out tracts or Bibles, about using the Bible as a textbook, about teaching about Christ in class, about meeting house-church Christians, or about witnessing in any way.
10. Don't refer to the mission agency (or MUPs) or your/their home church in letters sent to restricted or closed countries. Refer instead to our/your "home organization"; delete any reference to the agency/church logo or name, and mail in a plain envelope.

11. DO NOT try to "write between the lines." Anything that might seem to be a secret code could cause suspicions and misunderstandings.
12. DO NOT use the full name of any other Christians in the country, or otherwise pinpoint them.
13. In closed or restricted countries, do not refer to nationals or the staff working with your friend by name or location. Instead use a code name, private nickname or initials. If you're not sure whether the country your friend is in is closed or restricted, ask them when they're home, or ask their mission agency (MUPs) about the status of this country.
14. Unless your friend provides other instructions for you, use the address given to you in their prayer letters.
15. Mail time is always a highlight, especially if photos of friends and home are included (avoid photos of obvious church activities other than weddings). Special American days are a great time to show them you care through cards, foldouts, decorations, mini-posters, etc. Don't write "photo inside."
16. Before sending gift packages or tape recordings, consult your local post office for any postal restrictions. Then, check with your friend about the best way to send it (what shipping company to use, or any special instructions). Some packages never arrive, and others may involve your friend in lots of paperwork and expense (to retrieve it from the Customs agency in that country). Always email or air mail a list of contents separately when you mail a package. Often, there may be someone going to that particular country who can hand carry a small package.
17. Mark your calendar when you send something - to jog your memory to write again soon! Communication with friends back home is SO IMPORTANT to those overseas. Frequent cards are better than one long letter. And please understand if you don't always get an immediate or a personal reply. Your friend may be trying to communicate with a significant list of friends and supporters.
18. As you write, it is an excellent time to be in prayer for your friends. Truly, may you feel a part of their work as YOU support them in these enjoyable, yet vital means. GOD BLESS YOU!