

Short Guide for Bishops and Stake Presidents

This guide is from the book *Home Early ... Now What?*

If I could tell you one thing:

Your ward or stake will often follow your example in how you welcome an early RM.

1. Meet with the missionary's parents *before* the missionary returns.

Besides a quick phone call from the mission president (and sometimes not even that), parents will know very little about how to support an early RM. Even if you are not sure about what to do either, meeting with them prior to the missionary's return shows your support and a willingness to work directly with them during this time. While the parents will meet many of the needs of their missionary, they may need the ward to help meet their own needs. Consider bringing the Short Guide for Parents with you to your first visit. If you hear a missionary is coming home, do not assume that the mission president has called the parents directly and do your best to alert them and support them through the process. There have been times when parents have not found out about their missionary's return until last minute because priesthood leaders have assumed others have informed the parents.

2. Meet with the missionary as soon as possible.

It is absolutely vital that you meet with the missionary immediately upon their return and regularly over the next few months (at least). Similar to a convert, this missionary needs "a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with 'the good word of God'" (Gordon B. Hinckley, "Converts and Young Men," May 1997 *Ensign*). Do not make assumptions regarding the reason a missionary came home. Misunderstandings can be devastating. If a missionary came home for transgression, prayerfully consider treating their return as their first step to repentance.

Consider discussing some of the following questions in your first meeting:

- When will you be able to meet regularly over the next few months? (I recommend *at least* weekly during the first month. Trust grows with experience.)
- Should you announce that they are home and formally welcome them back to the ward? (This may be easier for the missionary than individual conversations with every member in the ward over the following few months.)
- If appropriate, would they like to pass the sacrament or give the closing prayer? (This can help members accept an early RM back into the ward more quickly.)

- When would be a good time for them to give a talk in church? (Most returned missionaries are asked to give a talk. This invitation is often neglected in the case of early RMs. Be aware that some might not feel emotionally ready, but giving them the opportunity can help them feel accepted.)
- How can the ward council best support them during this time? (Do they need a friend, home teachers and/or visiting teachers, meals delivered, priesthood blessings, etc.?)
- If appropriate, would they like a calling or a responsibility?

3. Realize that it may or may not be the Lord's will for a missionary to return to the field.

While you may have to ask whether a missionary is considering returning to the mission or not, do not add pressure. This is an extremely personal decision between the missionary and the Lord. Allow the missionary to receive their own revelation on the matter.

4. In the case of transgression:

There is no one reason why a missionary came home early, especially for transgression reasons. Prayerfully seek to know whether your particular missionary returned for an addiction they could not overcome, confession of a sin committed prior to the mission, not stopping a companion's behavior, or willful rebellion. While you'll approach each reason differently, proceed with love for all.

Bishops now have access to a "Ministering Resource" on helping early-returned missionaries at providentliving.lds.org.