

# Finding the right fit

By Karen O. Allen  
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## Missionary roles vary in length, funding for those willing to serve

For most, the term missionary implies someone who has devoted their life full time to follow God's calling to share the gospel where it has not been heard. Missionaries are displaced from their homes, culture and jobs to establish a presence in a new place, often in a different culture, doing a job with gospel purpose.

Career missionaries, or "team members," all over the globe are vital to fulfilling the Great Commission.

However, nontraditional missionaries not fully funded by the International Mission Board are taking on crucial roles to serve Kingdom purposes.

Many opportunities are available in a variety of short-term, mid-term and long-term capacities. There are missionary teams, missionary associates, team associates and field support missionaries.

Professionals, students and stay-at-home parents can serve for any length of time.

The global need for missionaries is more urgent than ever. The harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few. There are more than 7,000 unreached people groups incorporating 4.5 billion unreached people, according to the IMB 2021 Global Impact Guide.

Reaching the multitude is a massive effort. The unreached world needs anyone with a missional heart.

### Becoming a team associate

David and Shannon Brown recently joined the league of nontraditional missionaries, discovering an opportunity while browsing the IMB website.

The Browns felt called to serve

for a longer period after having been on multiple short-term missions trips. But they were not interested in being team members, nor did they want to be funded by a ministry organization, a church or the IMB. They wanted greater flexibility to enjoy their role as grandparents and retirees.

The IMB had an opportunity that met all their conditions. Being team associates would allow them to work alongside team members in their desired location in Eastern Europe. Since the minimum requirement is one year, they could choose whether to attend language school and how long they would stay.

They also could make trips back to the United States.

"We chose the self-funded route and included this in our financial planning for our retirement," the couple said.

"Our interest in this role developed as a result of the numerous previous short-term trips made and the relationships we developed."

The cost is out-of-pocket, including the responsibility of finding transportation and housing, but the Browns have additional support. The IMB provides consulting services to assist with health care, housing and visa support, among other things.

Contacts within their destination country will also provide assistance with immediate concerns. The Browns plan to attend an abbreviated language course.

"The team associate role began several years ago as a way for people who aren't appointed full-time missionaries to participate on existing church planting teams," said Mike Lazenby, IMB church mobilization strategist for the Gulf Region.

"They participate in the missionary task on either a full-time or a part-time basis, depending on what their circumstances allow."

Former IMB field support missionary Tom Boston said, "Business opens doors." He used his financial background to coordinate activities across the globe.

Team associates currently serve in every IMB global affinity. The Browns are the first to serve in that capacity in their Eastern Europe location.

Scotty Goldman, director of the office of global missions at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, likens the role of team associate to a temporary associate pastor.

Another nonfunded position is an associate missionary.

These full-time workers receive on-the-job training and work under the supervision of a missionary or other ministry leader.

They serve as a teacher for missionary kids, a refugee ministry worker, an ESL teacher or a community outreach worker with a local church.

### Student opportunities

The IMB Hands-On program is an international missions opportunity for students and young adults interested in working alongside a missionary mentor to share the gospel of Jesus with unreached peoples. Projects range from 4 months to 1 year in duration, and members of Southern Baptist churches can receive funding to cover half the cost.

When it comes to missions, everyone is called to pray, give, go or send, Boston said.

"If God is calling you, He will provide the resources."

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