The following article of the India Missions Association (IMA) shows a set of Codes of Good Practice as established by them over the past few years, and written for its member organizations.

Ministry, Leadership & Management

Preamble

India missions Association (IMA) in the early years of its formation worked out a comity agreement for members to adhere to. This was a pre-condition to IMA membership. The expansion of IMA members and the changed mission context presented the need to have a fresh look at the same document and also to go beyond comity agreement by adopting best practices applicable for all IMA members. Hence the Best Practices for IMA members may be described as a set of values, ethos and principles aimed at guiding the inter organization and intra organization relationships.

IMA

Best Practices are bench marks or goals towards which we corporately strive for the glory of God. Mission organizations and churches are not just focused on the results but the means we use to achieve the results. We need to go beyond the best practices and adopt common programs in partnership with one another. Excellence in ministry, leadership & management practices brings glory to God.

The first draft of this document was presented at the IMA Executive Committee meeting in August 2003 and circulated for suggestions to all IMA members during December 2003. The draft was then discussed during the open house discussions at the IMA

National Conference held in Hyderabad from 24thto 27thJune 2004. All the suggestions were incorporated and the document was adopted with the full consent of the participants present on 26th June 2004 and was brought into immediate effect for all IMA members to strive forward with God's help.

Scope of Application:

The Best Practices for IMA members applies to all the present member organizations who may be societies, trusts, churches, institutions, networks, agencies, para-church organizations etc., and all others when they become members in future.

Best Practices in Ministry:

1. Member organizations serving in a particular geographical area strives to fellowship, cooperate, network and partner with other Christian organizations, regional networks and national networks expressing the unity of the Church.

2. Member organizations do not open any new station in a geographical (rural, urban or tribal) area within the working distance of any other Christian organization.

3. Member organizations inform and consult other organizations serving within the working distance in the same geographical area but involved in different ministries when they plan to open any new station.

4. Member organizations enter into a mutual written agreement with other Christian organizations to confine themselves to their stated goals and not overlap in the future.

5. Member organizations encourage their workers within a geographical area – Pin Code area or a City to meet with other workers from other member organizations regularly for prayer and fellowship.

6. Member organization informs the leadership of the concerned organization about any overlap of ministry or intrusion into one another's work or structure.

7. Member organization's leadership immediately identifies solutions to any such problems between themselves through discussions. If they are unable to find any solution within a reasonable period they will mutually refer to the IMA leadership and abide by the final decision given by IMA.

8. Member organizations do not start a similar ministry in the same geographical area using the worker who has left the ministry and the services of another Christian organization. If the member organization (whose member has left the ministry) does not continue to have a ministry in that area, after the worker's leaving the ministry, the other organization may take up the worker with the consent of the first organization

9. Member organizations do not normally inherit the ministry started by another Christian organization in a particular geographical area as its own ministry, however with the written consent choose to continue a ministry in a particular geographical area started by another Christian organization that is unable to sustain the ministry.

10. Member organizations do not enter the congregation / fellowship groups established by another Christian organization or church without a specific invitation.

11. Member organizations do not normally take over the congregation / fellowship groups established by another Christian organization or church even if the pastor / leadership leaves the services of their organization and joins them voluntarily or otherwise. In case the organization is not in a position to continue the running of the congregation after the worker leaving, the other organization may take over the congregation with the consent of the first organization.

12. Member organizations recognize and respect the relationship of a congregation / fellowship / cell / group established by another Christian organization or church and do not appoint any other paid worker or volunteer to pastor or lead this congregation / fellowship.

Obligations to IMA in the context of Best Practices in ministry:

13. Member organizations annually inform IMA, the location of all their mission fields, branch offices, promotional offices and sister concerns. They also inform IMA of any changes periodically.

14. Member organization refer to IMA before opening any new station, field or ministry among any people groups or geographical areas to verify if there are any other member organization serving already or not.

15. Member organizations when requested for clarification by IMA on any disputes with other organizations render full-cooperation and provide all the required information and abide by the decisions made.

Best Practices in Communications:

16. Member organizations are sensitive in their language to show consideration for others and how they may perceive words, signs, symbols and pictures. This applies to oral or written communication in any medium including letters, reports, songs, prayers, books, magazines, newsletters and material on the Internet.

17. Member organizations avoid all exaggerations regarding the programs or activities from the mission fields including the focus on numbers in all their reports, newsletters or any other communications.

Best Practices in Information Security:

18. Member organizations that have had access to various mailing data base, research data base and other information in the form of print, electronic, digital or film do not misuse the same or give access to unauthorized persons causing security risks for themselves or other IMA members.

Best Practices in Pastoral Care:

19. Member organizations who establish congregations / fellowships assume responsibility for the care and nurture of them through organized discipleship training with the goal of making them self sufficient, self governing and self propagating.

20. Member organizations focus on creative ways of holistic mission to transform and empower the communities and people groups among whom they serve.

21. Member organizations respect, develop and enrich the culture and language of the people among whom they serve. They also encourage contextualization of the Gospel without compromising the core message of Jesus Christ.

22. Member organizations avoid any use of force, fraud (misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance) and inducement (the offer of a gift or gratification either in cash or in kind, grants of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise) in their ministry to the people.

Best Practices in Organizational Structure & Management:

23. Member organizations maintain a legal entity through appropriate registration under the relevant statutory enactments.

24. Member organizations democratically elect their governing board / Executive / Management Committee / Trustees with wide representation and backgrounds with not less than seven members. (Generally no two members of the same family may be the office bearers of the board)

25. Member organizations hold their annual general body meeting and their governing body meetings regularly (AGM annually and Board meetings twice in a year) and maintain the minutes and records in a proper manner.

26. Member organizations maintain a transparent system of accounting including internal audit and annual statutory audit of all their accounts by recognized chartered accountants. (All resources are handled in good stewardship & trust to fulfill common objectives and purposes and not misused for any personal gains)

27. Member organizations fulfill all statutory obligations under the Income Tax Act, Foreign Contributions Regulation Act, relevant labour laws and all other laws as applicable to their nature of work, ministry or geographical location.

28. Member organizations maintain a good relationship with all their donors and donor agencies through regular and efficient system of reporting and transparent accounting.

Best Practices in Organizational Leadership & Management:

29. Member organizations practice collective team leadership in their management and field ministry.

30. Member organizations do not absorb or appoint any worker who has left or been relieved from the services of another Christian organization without informing the concerned organization and getting a confidential reference.

31. Member organizations emphasize call and commitment to the cause of mission in their recruitment and provide continuous, quality education for all their personnel.

32. Member organizations intentionally identify, train, mentor and develop emerging leaders at different levels of their management.

33. Member organizations provide an ongoing investment of resources for the care, nurture, welfare and development of all their personnel (including singles, children and families) from recruitment through retirement.

34. Member organization voluntarily conduct periodic audit of its organizational policies and systems.

Best Practices in Local Church Relationship:

35. Member organizations maintain good relationship with the local churches and denominations influencing, motivating, equipping and assisting them in the cause of missions.

Definitions in the context of Best Practices for IMA members:

- **Mission Station:** A 'mission station' is a place where one or more paid / partly paid / volunteer workers of a particular organization reside permanently and serve in and around that place in organized evangelism / pastoral / socio-economic / educational / healthcare ministries. An occasional visit to the place by any worker will not amount to a place being designated as a 'mission station'.
- **Mission Field**: A Mission field may be a geographical location, people group, language group, socio-economic group, generational, vocational or religious groups.
- **Congregation**: A Congregation is a group of a minimum six adults led to faith, discipled, baptized, and given pastoral care by that organization. A smaller group is called a fellowship. A congregation may also refer to a 'local church'.
- **Working Distance**: A working distance may refer to the Postal PIN code area. Each Postal PIN code area represents a population of around 35,000 and in urban areas around one hundred thousand. The 'working distance' definition does not prohibit any ministry in a geographical area among different distinct people groups [for example: Punjabis and Tamils in Delhi] or are working among different linguistic groups [for example Bhojpuri's and Mythili in Patna] or are involved in two distinct ministries [for example: Bible Correspondence Follow-up and Ministry to the Blind] or are involved among different vocational or generational groups [for example students on campus and teenagers in the city].
- **Christian Worker**: A 'Christian worker' refers to all those called as a 'Missionary', 'Evangelist', Pastor, Social Worker, 'Swarthik', 'Native Pioneer / worker', 'Promotional staff', 'Administrative staff', etc. The Christian Worker receives full payment or partial payment towards supporting his personal needs, family needs, ministry expenses etc., from the organization. A recognized volunteer who does not receive any payment but is given a specific responsibility within the organization is also included as a Christian Worker.
- **Member Organization**: A 'member organization' refers to the existing members of India Missions Association and includes member church, denominations, institutions, networks, agencies and para-church organizations.

imacenter@imaindia.org <<