

Resolution Number: A-141

Subject: Evaluation of the Volunteers In Mission Program

Moved By: (Name) The Ven. Stuart Pike from the Diocese of Quebec

Seconded By: (Name) Mrs. Dorothy Davies-Flindall from the Diocese of Ontario

**Note: The mover and the seconder must be members of the General Synod and be present in the House when the resolution is before the synod for debate.**

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this General Synod affirm the Volunteers In Mission Program and request the Partners In Mission Committee to implement, as they see fit, the recommendations contained in the evaluation report, completed in March, 1998.

EXPLANATORY NOTE/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

( see attached summary and recommendations)

Source: Partners In Mission Committee  
(name of committee, diocese, etc.)

Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Executive Summary**

**Mission with a Face:  
Evaluation of the Volunteers in Mission Program  
Anglican Church of Canada**

Between October 1997 and February 1998 an evaluation was conducted of the Volunteers in Mission Program (VIM) of the Anglican Church of Canada.

The stated purpose of the Evaluation was “to assess the effectiveness of the VIM Program against the goals of the Program and our goals of mission and partnership”.

The principal evaluation issues and the methodology are outlined and described in the Evaluation Report. The major findings and conclusions included the following:

Volunteers in Mission is a worthwhile program that should be preserved and enhanced. VIM's is a flexible vehicle for individuals and overseas national churches to realize mission, but this flexibility also results in some question as to VIM's ability to set priorities and determine the direction of its own Program.

The value of the learning resulting from the VIM experience for volunteers and the Church at home was found to be extremely valuable, even for those who did not have a positive experience at their posts.

The very structural complexity of VIM which may sometimes make problem-solving so troublesome embodies some of the values so central to what VIM is.

The distribution of volunteers within Canada among the dioceses may be a more important issue than distribution abroad, assuming the importance of enriching the experience of the Canadian Church.

In comparison with the value of VIM with time and resources devoted to other mission-related activities, VIM presents a unique opportunity for personal involvement that no other mission activity can give; VIM is also a long term investment by the Canadian Church in mission.

Mission has become less abstract and more personal, and there is a feeling more connected to the worldwide Anglican communion as a result of VIM.

To address a weakness in the Program, there needs to be more standard and explicit expectations as to what the diocese will do, what the home parish is expected to do, what the support group will do and what the VIM Office will do to support and make maximum use of the volunteer on his/her return to Canada.

Among those things that need to be maintained are pre-departure and in-country orientation in preparation for the assignment, locally based funding and support groups, personal contact and communications with the VIM Office and support group, emphasis on partnership between sending and receiving churches, the volunteer nature of the program, the short-term postings and the prayer support.

Areas requiring change include addressing the problems of returning to Canada, streamlining the application process, clarification of the roles and responsibilities of various actors, providing more specific information on the country and post to which the volunteer is to be assigned and giving greater attention to the return period as one of the most critical phases of the volunteering process.

Mission is “here” more than that it is “there”, therefore, there is a need for care in the selection of the volunteer post, with particular reference to its learning potential, the

quality of the experience of the roughly two years spent and, of course, the attention to the planning and execution of the returning arrangements.

The volunteer is the medium through which the Church in Canada and abroad encounter each other; therefore the greatest of care and attention must be exercised in choosing the post, selecting the volunteer, matching the volunteer with the post, preparing the way home and making the most effective possible use of the returned volunteer on her/his return.

The flexibility which is characteristic of VIM, and which its limited size makes possible, is both a strength and weakness: the weakness is that inconsistencies in practice can grow up which invite invidious comparisons; the Report recommends maintaining as much flexibility as possible.

Regarding the optimum size of the Program, the main guiding principle ought to be the primacy of quality over quantity: the Report recommends maintaining a small program while human and financial resources remain limited.

Bringing mission volunteers from abroad would recognize the value of learning for partner churches in “the South” and underlies the notions of mutuality and equality in the mission enterprise.

VIM is a soundly conceived Program which meets a real need for Mission involvement by the Canadian Church without being an old-style missionary sending institution. The fundamentals of the Program appear to be the right ones and not to be in need of radical change. There are, to be sure, some reforms that might improve the Program itself and/or the way it is managed. These, however, would be ways of making an essentially worthwhile Program work better rather than a major overhaul.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** that the Partners in Mission Committee re-affirm its commitment to and support of the VIM Program as a valued and important contribution to the worldwide mission of the Anglican Church of Canada.

**Recommendation 2:** that VIM institute a type of “buddy system” whereby prospective and returned volunteers are matched at an early stage in the recruitment/selection process, but no later than the time of the actual selection, and that a commitment to playing such a mentoring and support role on their return to Canada be an explicit requirement of all volunteers from the moment of their acceptance.

**Recommendation 3:** that VIM, when assessing a potential placement, take special care to ensure that the officers of the host diocese are familiar with the issues, problems and protocols of receiving and supporting foreign volunteers, that each receiving diocese or institution be asked to prepare a plan for receiving, welcoming, orienting and training the VIM volunteer about to be posted, that each receiving diocese or institution be asked to appoint a liaison person/mentor to correspond with and provide necessary information and support the assigned volunteer from the time of acceptance through arrival and settling-in and that VIM review the materials it provides to host dioceses and institutions with a view to giving more guidance on receiving and providing moral and pastoral support to VIM

volunteers, in a cross-cultural context.

**Recommendation 4:** that, wherever recommended or required and feasible, opportunities for language training be arranged as part of the VIM experience and that time taken for training at the beginning be added on to (and not be deducted from) the period of the posting, as agreed between VIM, the host diocese/institution, the volunteer and the volunteer's support group,

that, in these situations, preference be given, *inter alia*, to posting volunteers who have demonstrated either some familiarity with the language of the country or some aptitude for the learning of second languages, and

that, in these instances, language training costs be calculated into the package for which funds must be raised.

**Recommendation 5:** that VIM institute an occasional newsletter which would, *inter alia*, keep volunteers, partner churches, support groups, home parishes and others informed about advice received, decisions taken and also provide a forum for the exchange and sharing of news of volunteer activities and the expression of views and opinions, and that this newsletter be distributed electronically and/or by mail, as appropriate to the circumstances of recipients.

**Recommendation 6:** that the standard VIM period of appointment be two years (normally understood to be 22-26 months) and that this policy be widely advertised; that exceptions be considered only in unusual and clearly defined circumstances and when there is full agreement between and amongst the host, the volunteer, the VIM National Office, the support group and designated representatives of the volunteer's home diocese and parish; and

, if a volunteer is to serve for a period of longer than two years, there be a period of well planned and organized VIM service time spent at home at the end of two years when the volunteer addresses churches and church gatherings and intensively engages in a planned program of public education activities.

**Recommendation 7:** that either the VIM Coordinator, the regional Coordinator or their designee make a site-visit in order to conduct a careful assessment of any post where VIM is considering making a placement and to discuss with the relevant supervisor(s) mutual expectations and the kind of supervision and support the volunteer is likely to need;

that this visit occur as close to the time of the anticipated posting as possible, and

that, in the event that VIM should decide, on the basis of an assessment that the post would be either unsuitable or not a good situation for a particular volunteer under consideration, it clearly inform the intended host bishop and/or other officer(s) of the reasons for the decision.

**Recommendation 8:** That the degree, depth and quality of the applicant's parish involvement and experience be considered an important criterion in the selection of volunteer.

**Recommendation 9:** that VIM consult with present and previous volunteers to determine whether or not there would be any interest in forming a volunteer association, what the purposes of such an association might be, what activities potential members would value,

how it would be organized and maintained, who would give leadership and how it would be financed.

**Recommendation 10:** that VIM accept that there is a need to provide enhanced support to volunteers in the returning process;

that VIM re-examine the draft agreement which it signs with its volunteers, support groups and other bodies to see how it might be made more explicit with respect to the effective use of returned and returning volunteers and the support that will be required to that end;

that the proposed VIM newsletter (Recommendation 5) highlight stories of ways by which support groups and parishes have made particularly effective use of returned volunteers to tell the VIM story and what lessons have been drawn; and that all support groups be asked to prepare a plan, in consultation with the returning volunteer, several months in advance of the person's return to Canada for the volunteer's speaking engagements and other forms of exposure and to share this information with the VIM National Office.

**Recommendation 11:** that, with the present level of resources at the National level, the VIM remain a small Program, emphasizing the quality of the mission experience for the volunteer, host church and the Canadian church; and that a rough guideline to be around ten to twelve (10-12) volunteers serving two year terms in the field at any given time.

**Recommendation 12:** that VIM announce its willingness to arrange placements of overseas VIM volunteers in Canadian settings;

that, to the extent possible, the terms and conditions be similar to those which apply to Canadians serving abroad as VIM volunteers.