

COMMISSIONING THE MISSIONS TEAM

Neal Pirollo

There is a growing awareness within the Christian community that the Church is to play a major role in the missions process. The physical plant and the spiritual environment of churches is more and more communicating: We are a church committed to a global mission. This is good. So, the church has groomed the missionary, from even before he thought to be a missionary. But, now he is grown. He has sensed a personal call. That call has been confirmed by the church leadership, following the model of Act 13:1-2. All training is complete. Logistic details are in order. The church/agency relationship is clear. A Partnership Team has been developed. The missionary is ready to go. Now what? Just go to the airport with banners and balloons and say, "Good-bye?" No!

The next two verses of Act 13: "...and they laid their hands on them and sent them away. So, they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit..." The commissioning service.

I have attended many. Some were just a brief prayer by the pastor at the end of a service. Another had the leader anoint with oil the great toe of the right foot and right ear lobe of those leaving, followed by prayer. Yet another included the ordination of the missionary with the commissioning. But I would like to tell a story:

The adult children of some friends of ours were ready to go to the field. Our friends asked us to join them for their kids' commissioning service. I groaned! It was to be held on a Sunday afternoon. In San Diego, that is either beach time or nap time. But out of respect for our friendship, we agreed to go.

When we arrived, the church parking lot was packed! We had to park down the street. We entered the sanctuary to find all the seats taken. People were already lining the walls on both sides. We squeezed into a place along the wall. "What is going on?" I thought.

After an opening prayer and a hymn, the elders took their place, standing in a semi-circle on the platform. (The pulpit had been moved aside.) The head elder spoke of the church's opportunity to be a part of this great work in East Africa and gave the details of this couple's involvement. Then he called the couple to come forward and stand before them. Question after question was asked with their answer in the affirmative to each one, acknowledging the responsibilities they were planning to assume on the field. It was amazing...almost like wedding vows! I was impressed. There was a seriousness about the ceremony that spoke of the seriousness of their commitment to fulfill what they were expecting to do.

I thought: This is great! The head elder had them sit down. Wild applause reverberated across that vaulted room. My next thought was: Okay. Another hymn and we're out of here! Still time for a nap! No way! To my utter surprise...

The head elder spoke to the entire congregation: "Please rise." We all stood. (A hundred or so of us were already standing!) And now, with one accord, we were requested to respond in the affirmative to the following questions. Again, question after question of our commitment to support the couple with prayer, encouragement, communication, finance...I was so shocked, I don't remember all the questions asked! After each question, there was a resounding, YES! Then, a closing prayer and we were ushered into the Fellowship Hall for a full banquet dinner. I am sure the enthusiastic sound of their full congregation's affirmation resonated in their ears and hearts long after the dinner was over.

How many times on the field did they rest in the encouragement that was given to them by that dual commissioning service? I would imagine that when they were bouncing for two hours over the dirty, rutted

roads to a hospital as she was hemorrhaging after a miscarriage, they were embraced in God's love and the love expressed by their church. Was she thankful for the church's expression of care and support when she caught her three-year-old had climbed to the top of a 30-foot water tower and couldn't get down? Or when the mamba snake slithered out from under their 5-year old's bed?

And the church sent them out...! What a privilege our Master has given to us who don't sense a call to go to the "regions beyond." As Paul expressed it to the Christians in Philippi, "I rejoice greatly...for you have been partners in the Gospel from the very first day even until now." (Philippians 1:5) Today, we can be a 'partner in the Gospel' with a missionary friend, rendering meaningful service according to the ministry gifts God has given us.

Copyright © 2019*

EMMAUS ROAD INTERNATIONAL

7150 Tanner Court, San Diego, CA 92111 USA

www.eri.org • 858 248-3330 • Emmaus_Road@eri.org

(* This White Paper may be reproduced only in its entirety, and without charge.)