

## December 2009 Christmas and Missionaries

Christmas is a season that most Baptists associate with missionaries. For years we have collected an offering to support "foreign missionaries" in their work to spread the Gospel. We no longer call them "foreign missionaries" and instead call them "global missionaries" or "international missionaries." The word "foreign" gave a connotation of being alien or weird or something different from us. We have come to recognize these missionaries as being merely in another place, not a strange place. Besides, since we can text message our missionaries, how can they be "foreign"? The world has shrunk, or to use Tom Friedman's phrase, "the world is flat."

These missionaries are in jeopardy. There is a macro-shift taking place in churches that is threatening the long-term status and existence of our full-time global missionaries. Here is the shift: **Churches are spending more and more on their own short-term mission efforts to the detriment of full-time missionary support.** Local churches are sending more teams to do short-term mission work. This is causing a decrease of support for full-time missionaries. This fairly recent phenomena has both positive and negative ramifications.

The positive side is that more and more local church members are able to travel and serve as short-term missionaries in other countries. By seeing the world, walking with the local villagers, building homes, offering medical care to local citizens, and speaking to people directly about the Gospel the local church members are stretched and grow in their faith and commitment. They develop bonds with people of other countries. They experience the reward of a larger Christian community and come to appreciate the abundance God has bestowed on American churches.

The negative side is that funds are diverted from full-time missionary work around the world. It is the full-time missionaries who nurture trust with people in other countries. Ministry that lasts beyond a life-time often takes years and years to develop. Two week stays are no substitute for long-term missionary work to plant churches, establish medical clinics, build schools, coordinate work in communities, and nurture relationships essential to building up the body of Christ. Think for example, if Christian Flights International had no full-time paid coordinator to organize the work of all our short-term trips to Haiti. Short-term trips don't happen without long-term and full-time personnel to give their lives to the work of organization, promotion, education, fund-raising, and relational development.

That's why our Christmas offering to global missions is so important. Dan Vestal, Coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, recently wrote to thousands of churches pleading with us not to forsake our full-time missionaries on the ground in places like Nigeria, China, Lebanon, Haiti, and Mexico. Cutbacks are taking place because of this macro-shift in missionary support. We simply can't send all the missionaries who want to serve overseas because of a shortage of financial support.

Let's not give up our short-term missionary work, but let's not reduce our support for long-term missionary work either. It's not either/or. It's both/and. Without the full-time missionaries on the ground, we won't be able to go on short-

term mission trips. Give generously this Christmas to the CBF Global Missions Offering or the SBC Lottie Moon Offering. Our goal is \$10,000.

P.S. In addition (yes, "IN ADDITION"!!) to my Christmas missions offering I have also started a fund to send a student from the India Baptist Theological Seminary to Baptist World Alliance meeting in Hawaii in July 2010. The estimated cost of this scholarship is \$1500. If you would like to give something to this scholarship to give an Indian student the unprecedented opportunity to attend this inspirational meeting you can write a check to Yates Baptist Church and put "BWA Scholarship" in the memo.