

Article:

## “The Missionary’s Daughter is a Civil Engineer.” Valuing the Sending Function of the Church

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### Synopsis:

A new generation of missionaries with unique professional, creative access, and conceptual needs are continuing to cross cultural and linguistic borders with the Gospel of Jesus Christ but are doing so without membership in a traditional missions agency. Their commitment to make disciples and plant churches remains high, but whether from necessity or preference, they are working overseas in secular jobs which are seemingly-unrelated to Christian missions. Three advantages, at least, to working in these secular jobs are: 1) the worker’s salary and moving expenses are fully paid, and the Church can deploy its financial support elsewhere; 2) these jobs can fulfill a broader missional mandate if the work contributes to physical, environmental, or development needs; and 3) the worker “incarnates” into the national economy and thus can demonstrate a Christian lifestyle to national disciples.

The biggest potential drawback to this new model of missions is the danger everyone faces in losing the sending function of the local Church. The privilege of the local church in commissioning and sending out missionaries is illustrated in Acts 13 (Barnabas and Paul sent out from Antioch) and explained in Romans 10 (“... and how will they preach unless they are sent.”) In the past century of modern missions, we have so conflated *financial* support with “sending,” that we may potentially forget all the other means of support on which Gospel-preaching missionaries depend. Just because a new generation of missionaries might not need our financial donations, they still need our prayers, accountability, encouragement, and facilitation, etc.

“Sending Services” is the name of a proposed new approach to sending. Non-traditional missionaries and their home churches would associate with mission agencies, not as members, but as clients. The local church will commission these new workers, and thus “send” them with a strong commitment to prayer, accountability and other forms of support. The sending services agency facilitates this through maintaining address lists, publishing prayer letters, distributing accountability reports, and offering ministry and cross-cultural consultation, etc.

Throughout the article, Sending is examined in the story of a fictional, non-traditional missionary named Sydney who is going to West Africa as a civil engineer. We’ll also reflect on one of the most famous of the (alleged) “un-sent” modern missionaries, Bruchko. The author’s organization, Eden Vigil, is providing sending services for its first non-traditional missionaries, a couple going to Central African Republic to work for a safari company.



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## **“The Missionary’s Daughter is a Civil Engineer.” Valuing the Sending Function of the Church**

by Lowell Bliss  
Eden Vigil

If you had grown up in their sending church, you would have easily recognized them as missionaries. For one thing, they introduced themselves as such. “Hi, we are John and Susan Smith. We’re missionaries in Taiwan.” Occasional bulletin inserts, as well as their photo out on the world map in the lobby, also identified them: “Missionaries of the Week: John and Susan Smith, serving in Taiwan with OMF.” They were members of Overseas Missionary Fellowship. Their host government recognized them as missionaries, complete with a five-year multiple entry missionary visa. Even the IRS labeled them as missionaries. John was not ordained in your church’s denomination, but he was commissioned by your church and was a member of a mission agency, and so each year on his 1040 tax forms, he indicated his occupation as “Member of a Religious Order.” It was a funny thing for an evangelical Protestant like John Smith to write, but everyone in the church knew what it meant: missionary.

Even without these labels, John and Susan Smith were recognizable as missionaries. They had both graduated from a Bible college or seminary with degrees in International Ministries. They spoke at mission conferences, either at your church or at local Christian colleges. They sent out regular prayer letters and their prayer card was held with a magnet on your parent’s refrigerator door to remind your family to pray. If John and Susan had served in a different country, they may have been *creative access* missionaries, that is, they may have held a “tentmaking” job. The host government may not have known of them as missionaries. As tentmakers, they would have likely had to explain to your church what *creative access* means, but it still would have been easy for your church to understand: John and Susan are missionaries.

Sydney Smith, the daughter of John and Susan, appeared on many of the family prayer cards over the years. In each successive photo, she was older and taller. Now Sydney is all grown up. She has graduated from college and one day she makes the announcement of her intention to “follow in her parents’ footsteps.” Now, it’s important that we understand exactly what she means by this, because things are going to get complicated for your home church. Sydney loves Jesus. She wants to live for Him. She doesn’t want a “career;” she wants a ministry. Sydney is committed to the Great Commission. She wants to share her faith with others who are far from God. In college, she was active in many campus ministries. She trained herself in how to disciple others. In addition, Sydney really wants to return overseas. She wants to live and serve cross-

culturally. She has a burden for least-reached peoples. She supposes that she could have returned to Taiwan, her childhood home, but she considers it a mark of the Lord’s leading that the overseas opportunity she is pursuing is in East Africa.

In other words, Sydney wants to be a missionary like her parents. Right?

Well. . . that’s the problem. Sydney didn’t go to Moody Bible Institute; she went to Texas A&M. She didn’t study International Ministries, but Civil Engineering. She’s an engineer. The opportunity she is pursuing is a job opening. Rather than signing a covenant with a traditional missions agency, she’ll be signing a contract with a multinational construction firm. She won’t have to ask your church for a dime of support. In fact, out of her generous new salary, she intends to send money back to your church as her tithe. On the last Sunday before her departure, church members might gather around her out in the lobby and wish her well, but there won’t be a commissioning service.

Does this mean that Sydney won’t be able to “follow in her parents’ (missionary) footsteps”? No, but it does mean that she won’t be a recognizable missionary like her parents were. Unrecognizability will actually open up some opportunities for her that her parents didn’t have, but it could also mean that Sydney loses out on some very important things which God Himself has programmed into the missionary enterprise. The most important thing she loses out on is what the Apostle Paul calls in the Church at Philippi, the “partnership (*koinonia*) in the gospel.” Missions is, at its very heart, a *sending* function. First the Holy Spirit calls, and then the local church commissions. The topic of this paper is the question: how can we preserve the sending function of the Church so as to maximize the Kingdom value of Sydney’s cross-cultural life and ministry?

### **Sydney, her friends, and their reasons**

To broaden out our example, there are any number of reasons why someone like Sydney might pursue an overseas, cross-cultural ministry with a secular paycheck and no missionary recognizability. At an Urbana Missions Conference, Sydney had three other classmates from her Navigator’s chapter at Texas A&M who felt led overseas. None of them were going as recognizable missionaries. For example, Jason was taking a job in the Muslim country of Morocco where he couldn’t *afford* to be labeled as a missionary. Not only would his business visa be at risk, but so could his very life and (more importantly Jason worries) the lives of his disciples. In an easily-“Googlized” world, Jason wouldn’t dare risk his name appearing on his church’s website as “missionary of the week.”

Amber is joining a non-profit organization known more for its development work than for the gospel-preaching,

disciple-making, church-planting ministry that characterized the work of Sydney's parents. Amber is committed to preaching the gospel and making disciples but she doesn't know how to communicate her ministry to her church. They are a conservative bunch missiologically. While they are happy to wish Amber well, for them to somehow grant Amber "missionary" status would worry some as a slip into the "social gospel." Missionary resources (including prayers as well) are reserved for church planting.

William actually approached a mission agency and considered joining as a missionary member. He too is a Civil Engineering grad. He heard of a job opening in Bangladesh that could allow him to enter the country as a tentmaker. But when he inquired of his favorite mission agency about the application process, he was informed that membership was a lengthy thing. New Personnel Orientation—what Sydney's parents knew as "Candidate School"—wasn't scheduled until January, six months away. Afterwards, he would be asked to take 30 credit hours of Bible and Theology from a local Bible college. William may be impatient by nature, but he strongly feels two things: first, that this job opening in Bangladesh is a wonderful opportunity which won't wait till next year; and secondly, that his Bible and ministry training that he has already received through Navigators at A&M is sufficient for the type of ministry that he will have in Bangladesh. There is one more thing troubling William, and it seems to trouble Sydney too, as well as Amber, Jason, and others of their generation. William had actually spent six months in Bangladesh as a short term missionary. On a couple of occasions, when his Bangladeshi friends asked him directly, "You're a missionary, aren't you?" William felt like he was lying when he said, "No." Authenticity is a high value for William's generation. He wants the freedom to say, "I'm a Civil Engineer who loves Jesus and who proclaims His good news wherever He might lead me. But, no I'm not a paid member of any missionary organization."

Sydney may feel much of what William feels, but mostly she holds so firmly in her head the traditional model of missionary service that her parents embodied, that it's hard for her to think of herself as a missionary. She has simply joined the Globalized Economy and taken a civil engineering job that could have landed her anywhere in the world but, happily for her, is landing her in East Africa. If you ask her, she will tell you that she's chosen a different career path than her parents. And yet, she wishes that she could explain to her church that she has felt the Lord's leading as strongly as whatever it was her parents may have understood as a "calling." In addition, she wishes that her church, family and friends would affirm her in what she knows is true of her heart. She has a deep longing for those who are far from God. She intends to tell her new unbelieving friends about Jesus. She easily imagines herself offering Bible studies in her apartment for young unbelieving

women. She wants to get actively involved in a local African church. In addition, she knows that, more than just making money for her company, the engineering project that she'll be working on will mean a lot to the local African community. They'll be supplying jobs, but when they are done, many more villages than ever before will be protected from seasonal flooding. Sydney traces her interest in civil engineering in the first place to some heart-breaking photos of flood victims that she once saw in a magazine. Deep down in her heart, Sydney knows that her "secular" job and her assignment in East Africa is God's leading for her to live, if not a "missionary" life, then a "missional" one. Despite all of this, Sydney still feels some unease, even some guilt. To chose unrecognizability over recognizability sometimes feels like choosing the secular over the sacred. "Am I betraying my parents even?" she sometimes wonders.

### **What Sydney Does Not Need**

Sydney leaves for East Africa in four months. As for prospects for success overseas, there is much that she does not need.

The most obvious thing she does not need is money. Sydney's moving and set-up expenses—what her parents' mission agency called "out-going expenses"—are all covered by the company. There is already a desk waiting her in an office, and the office has a sizeable operating budget. Her parents had to raise "work funds" to fund the day-to-day operations of their ministry, but Sydney will be unaware most of the time of how her work is funded, and any out-of-pocket expenses will automatically be reimbursed. Retirement and medical insurance is covered. And then of course, there's her salary. She's well paid. Where she'll be in East Africa, there's not a lot for a single woman to spend money on. She expects to have so much left over each month that she's considering sending some of it to Amber or Jason, or to some "real" missionaries, perhaps even her parents. Wouldn't that be funny?, she thinks. The point is that Sydney does not need money from anyone.

"Our church *supports* John and Susan Smith, missionaries with OMF to Taiwan." The words *missionary support* are recognizable words. We know what that term means. First and foremost, it means money. It is a shorthand way of saying, "Each and every month, we send a set tax-deductible donation to OMF, designated for John and Susan." Admittedly, financial donations are mightily *supportive*. It translates directly into the rice and vegetables on the Smiths' dinner table. It pays for the Taiwanese Bibles that they distribute freely. It covers their medical expenses and provides for their retirement. A portion of the donation is used by the Smiths' supervisors, to provide pastoral care and administrative support. A financial gift or pledge is a powerful "vote of confidence" for a missionary. Sydney still remembers overhearing one supporter telling her parents,

“Where your treasure is, there is your heart also.’ We just want to let you know that our heart is with you and with God’s ministry through you.” Once we’ve established money’s importance in missionary support, most people usually go on to identify all the other ways that a church can also provide “support” to missionaries: through prayer, through encouragement, through correspondence and care packages, through welcoming them back on furlough, through advice, through watching over kids who return to the U.S. for college, etc. In fact, in the case of prayer, some people might even verbalize the biblical conviction that prayer is an even more crucial activity for “supporting missionaries” than donating money. But donating money has such a lock on the term *missionary support*, that once money is not a need, it can be hard to recognize an overseas worker as a “real” missionary.

Your church, the Smiths’ sending church, provided money for John and Susan. Sydney doesn’t need money. Similarly, OMF, the Smiths’ mission agency, provided certain services which Sydney doesn’t need. For example, Sydney doesn’t need any additional professional training. She’s about to get some on-the-job experience and there will be plenty of professional seminars in her future in order to hone her engineering skills, but her company will see to all of that. She’ll be adequately supervised and have regular reviews at work. In fact, her accountability will be likely more regular, strict, and consequential than what her parents received from missionary field leaders. Mission agencies notably provide cross-cultural training and language acquisition training and supervision. Since the stakes for cultural sensitivity and language fluidity are so high for missionaries who want to see Christ incarnated in local hearts and cultures, mission agencies have produced some of the highest quality training programs in the world. But the business world, operating in the context of heightened globalized competition, has also begun to invest in cross-cultural and language training. Sydney will get some help from her company. Besides she has her childhood experience as an MK to draw from. She has come by her bi-cultural ability naturally.

But Sydney wants to be “missional” in her work overseas. She doesn’t plan to work strictly with blueprints and schematics; she wants to work with people. She wants to work with *real* people, to enter their very lives, those odd mixtures of joy and sorrow, hopes and fears, sin and glory. She wants to preach the Gospel. She wants to make disciples. Who knows, maybe one of her Bible studies will grow into a fellowship and into a church? Would that make her a “church-planter”? Mission agencies certainly can supply ministry and church-planting expertise.

Here is the point where we, the recognizable missionaries and the established mission agencies, are going to have to exercise the highest degree of humility. Maybe Sydney is adequately equipped for ministry success. She doesn’t have

a Bible college or seminary degree, like we do. She isn’t conversant with the latest missiological trends or best practices, like we are. She has a growing expertise of civil engineering, but not of church-planting. But maybe she knows *enough*, and is skilled *enough*, to successfully accomplish everything that the Lord will demand of her in ministry in East Africa. She grew up in a devout Christian home. She has effectively engaged the spiritual disciplines for years. She has availed herself to the teaching of her home church. Her time with the Navigators at Texas A&M wasn’t meant to just keep her faith alive; it was meant to bring the Word of God into her life, so that she might be, in the words of II Timothy 3:17, “adequate, equipped for every good work.”

In a subsequent section of this essay, we will explore the actual etymology of the word *missionary*, but I’ve long been curious of how we’ve been moving away from that term. At one point in Christar’s recent history, an outside consulting firm was brought in to help facilitate our name change away from International Missions, Inc. (IMI). This was a needful change and was skillfully handled, but one suggestion that Christar did not act upon was the one that advised us to start calling individual workers “change agents,” not missionaries. That was just way too radical, modern, or trendy for our taste. But we do seem happy to substitute the term “church planter” for missionary, or sometimes I hear “church-planting missionary.” This can serve to highlight one of Christar’s distinctives: Christar missionaries seek to establish local indigenous churches. In this way, the term *church-planting missionary* can serve to differentiate various types of missions work. John and Susan Smith had colleagues in Taiwan who were *medical missionaries* or *Bible translators*, while still being members of OMF. Sometimes though, when I introduce myself as a “church-planter,” I can identify motives in my heart that are less than excellent. I have friends—I have financial supporters—who are doctors, lawyers, and yes, civil engineers. Is it pride, jealousy, or insecurity, but I want them to know that I am just as much of an expert, just as much of a professional, in my field as they are in theirs? As a church-planter, I project that I possess a set of esoteric skills which they lack, and which they couldn’t hope to obtain without my years of study, experience, and gifting. While this may be true, neither is it helpful, particularly if it detracts from humility.

Author Eugene Peterson has said, “A healthy noun doesn’t need adjectives. Adjectives clutter a noun that is robust. But if the noun is culture-damaged or culture-diseased, adjectives are necessary.” Peterson regrets that the term *pastor* is one such beloved term weakened by cultural expectations. “The essence of being a pastor begs for redefinition,” he says. “To that end, I offer three adjectives to clarify the noun: *unbusy, subversive, apocalyptic*.” As for the noun *missionary*, we might suggest one adjective:

*humble*. The power of humility to attract the grace of God, while pride invites His opposition (James 4:6), might lead us to consider that Sydney could be even more of an effective minister in East Africa than those who arrive there as church-planters. The label *missionary* would set Sydney apart from the people, but not the label *civil engineer*. True, she may have a level of education and salary higher than most East Africans, but even the most uneducated will be able to identify with someone who has worked her way up in the work-a-day world. Nonetheless, I'm more interested in the humility that Sydney might more naturally bring to a moment of witnessing to a friend, leading a Bible study, or counseling a new believer. The thought in her head of "Hey, I'm not a professional," could, if she keeps her heart right, lead her to trust the simplicity of the Gospel itself rather than the cleverness of her gospel presentation. She would encourage herself to "keep it simple" because she distrusts her ability to make Bible teaching nuanced. Maybe she would look to prayer more—a dependence that leaves God's prerogatives unassailed—because she lacks the "skill" (not to mention the time and energy) to minister like a church planter does. When I look back on my fourteen years as a church-planting missionary in India, and when I identify my "moments of greatest success" (defined as I think God would define them), I discover two things. First, some of these successes were *in spite* of my best efforts, not because of them. I may have laid out some grossly-misinformed plans. I may have stumbled ineptly. Sometimes, it was even sin. But God acted graciously, mercifully, and quietly and hiddenly. Secondly, other of my successful moments were the result of when I acted most simply, when I didn't try anything fancy, when I spoke briefly and straightforwardly. This is a strange thing, because I was trained to think that the Hindu Religious Mind was subtle and inscrutable. I was trained to believe that my apologetic for a Hindu must be elaborate and nuanced. I was led to believe that only a professional had a chance of success. Not so.

### What Sydney Needs, Part I

I don't wish to discredit the excellent training that I did receive as an International Ministries major at Moody Bible Institute, nor what I have received from Christar, and from many worthy conferences, books, and ministry seminars. I have also benefited greatly from listening to the stories of older missionaries. I'm grateful that I had access to them and that they were so willing to share freely with me. So, there is much, very much, that Sydney can still learn. My point in the section above is that Sydney had *enough* to show up overseas and begin doing the work of preaching the Gospel and making disciples. She also knows *how to learn*, an important skill. She is teachable. Sydney may know *enough* to do well, but her love for Christ and for the least-

reached means she wants to know *more* in order to do better. Church-planting missionaries—those *humble* church-planters who've learned not to trust their own expertise—do possess a wealth of knowledge, experience, and best practices. Sydney needs a means of accessing this wisdom. She needs teachers—something that a traditional mission agency can supply, or facilitate, for her.

But what does Sydney need first? I believe that first and foremost, Sydney needs a blessing pronounced over her. She needs to be affirmed that she is indeed "walking in her parents' footsteps," albeit wearing a different shoe. She is indeed participating in missions, albeit not as a recognizable missionary. Sydney herself must be convinced that it is the terminology which is tripping her up. Indeed, as Shakespeare discerned, "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Her parents, John and Susan Smith, sat comfortably among all the acquired baggage of the missionary enterprise. Those appurtenances—whether labels, prayer cards, conferences, academic majors, *missionary support*—served the Smiths well. But those appurtenances were never what made John and Susan Smith missionaries; they were only what made them *recognizable* as missionaries. David Mays of ACMC has published a workbook entitled *More Stuff You Need to Know About Doing Missions in Your Church*. He devotes his first page to "Definitions: What is Missions? What is a Missionary?" He quotes fourteen different definitions. The ACMC definition reads:

Missions is the worldwide enterprise of making disciples of the nations that falls outside the normal outreach responsibilities of the local church.

Prominent missionary theology Stephen Neill is quoted as saying:

Missions is the intentional crossing of barriers from Church to non-church in word and deed for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel.

And so, what is it about Sydney's overseas experience that is different from her parents' that would disqualify her from sharing this definition? Is she not also intentionally crossing barriers, making disciples, going to the unchurched, proclaiming the Gospel, living out the Gospel in word and deed? But actually there is one component, reflected in many of the remaining definitions in Mays' book, which differentiates Sydney from her parents. Robert Reeves, in *What the Bible Says About Missions*, writes:

Mission is the sending across cultural barriers by Christ through the church evangelists whose primary function is to make disciples of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the good news about Jesus.

Woody Phillips in *Let's Define Missions* says it simply:

When a person is ‘sent out’ beyond the borders and influence of the local church to make disciples, that is missions.

The difference is in the “sending.” John and Susan were *sent*; Sydney was merely hired. Woody Phillips is working from the etymology of the word *missionary*. The word missionary simply means “one who is sent,” or “sent one:” the Latin *missionem* (nom. *missio*) “act of sending,” from *mittere* “to send.” The term is traced to the 1590s and was originally used of Jesuits sending some of their members abroad.

Ray Tallman—who incidentally was one of those excellent teachers that I had while at Moody—is also quoted with a definition:

A missionary is “a ministering agent, selected by God and His church, to communicate the gospel message across any and all cultural boundaries for the purpose of leading people to Christ and establishing them into viable fellowships that are also capable of reproducing themselves.”

Tallman’s definition, like David Mays’s own bias, is slanted to the church-planting side of missions. In other words, it’s hard to locate Sydney’s flood mitigation engineering projects in his definition. (I don’t think I ever heard the word “missional” when I was at Moody, but that was back in the early 1980’s.) But Tallman’s reference to *sending* is embodied in the phrase “selected by God and His church.” It is possible that Sydney has been “selected by God.” She certainly believes so. Even her parents have affirmed her that she is accurately following the Lord’s leading to go as a civil engineer to East Africa. What then is missing? She has been selected by God, but not yet by the Church. The only reason why Sydney isn’t a missionary is because the Church hasn’t yet caught up with God’s sending.

### **The Importance of the Sending Function of the Church**

The early 1980s were the great apex of the ministry of Christian singer Keith Green before he died in a plane crash in 1982. He had a strong commitment to missions and promoted a radical lifestyle conducive to missions. One of his most famous tracts was entitled *Why YOU Should Go to the Mission Field* (1982). In Mays’s list of definitions, Green offers his one:

A Christian missionary is a person whose passion is to make the Lord Jesus known to the whole world. I believe that ‘being a missionary’ in the truest sense of the word is taking the Gospel where it has never been before, or at least to a different culture or a different language group. A

true missionary is someone who will risk everything for the sake of the lost of the world.

Keith Green would have loved the passion of Sydney, Jason, Amber and William. But his definition contains no reference to “sending.” Green himself was Jewish and was raised in Christian Science. His early rock music career included drugs and eastern mysticism. He didn’t become a follower of Christ until after his marriage to Melody, also Jewish. Their ministry quickly developed as an outreach residence in Los Angeles and was officially named Last Days Ministries. In other words, while Keith Green was enamored with missions, he never had an experience of the local church and its sending function within missions. He never had an occasion to see Sending. His model of a “true” missionary is of the individual who heroically responds to God’s calling and goes. Missions is going. At the end of Green’s *Why YOU Should Go*, he includes a booklist which features, among others, his archetype of a true missionary, Bruce Olson. Green writes:

Bruchko - The remarkable story of Bruce Olson. As a 19-year-old American boy, he followed the call of the Lord against incredible odds into the jungles of Venezuela. Near death after being shot with an arrow, he recovered and, all alone, without the help of any missionary society, he evangelized the savage Motilone Indians.

Bruce Olson has long thrilled readers with the story of a missionary rebel who did it “without the help of any missionary society,” and by implication, without the sending of a local church. Bruchko’s story is instructive. At one point during his studies at the University of Minnesota, he applied to, what he calls, “a well-known mission board” or a “well-established mission board.” He was turned down. Devastated he returned to college. In his autobiography, he writes:

But many times as I studied in the library I felt God nudging me. “Bruce, I want you in South America.”

“But, Lord, I tried that. Don’t You remember? I was turned down.”

“Turned down by whom?”

“Why, by the mission board, of course.”

It was as though God were smiling at me, amused and tolerant. “Bruce, I didn’t turn you down. I want you in South America. Follow Me.”

This snippet of divine dialogue seems to put God’s imprint on missionary independence. “Selected by God” is enough to make Olson a missionary, whether he is additionally “selected by His church” or not. Unlike Keith Green, Bruce Olson had extensive childhood experience in a local church, but it seems to be a uniformly deadening experience. If we grew up as Olson did, we too might have

proceeded as Bruchko did. But Bruchko makes the same conceptual mistake that Sydney has been making. Mission boards, especially the well-established varieties, are just part of the helpful infrastructure that have sprung up around modern missions; they are not part of the *essence* of missions. Sydney said, "I am not a real missionary because I am not a paid member of a mission agency." Bruchko claims not to be a "sent" missionary because he is not a paid member of a mission agency. But mission agencies do not *send* missionaries. They don't send anyone. The local church sends out missionaries and they do it *through* agencies. Therein we have the true understanding of the function of a mission agency, whether of OMF, Christar, or the well-established one that turned down young Bruce Olson. The word *agency* means "through." OMF acts as an agent to facilitate the sending function of your local church so that John and Susan Smith could go to Taiwan.

The fact of the matter is that Bruce Olson did find a supportive church before he left for Venezuela. Through his best friend Kent Lange, he was welcomed into a lively congregation where Kent's dad was the pastor. There was a "big church send-off" on the way to the airport. Once, while on the field, with the need to fly to Caracas but with no means, Olson received a letter. "It was from the Langes, just a short note. But with it a check for one hundred dollars—the promised support from the church. It had come when I needed it, not a day sooner, not a day later." A year earlier, when Olson was still stateside, when he had stepped off a train in Chicago where he had gone penniless to obtain his passport and visa, he had spied a ten dollar bill fluttering on the ground, a wonderful confirmatory gift from God. His book of course is full of such wonderful anecdotes, but the difference between the ten dollar bill and the one hundred dollar check is how Olson chooses to describe the latter: "the promised support from the church." In other words, Bruce Olson may have been more "sent" than he thought. Olson's mother tells the story of a visit that Pastor Lange once made to her. She tells of the visit to her son, "And then when Mr. Lange, the pastor from the tabernacle, was here a couple of weeks ago, he said that he believes your idea of going to South America is coming from God." If Lange had voiced those same sentiments in front of the congregation at the tabernacle—and I bet you he did—it would have sounded an awful like a commissioning service.

At one early point in Venezuela, Olson was depressed. "I lay down on my bed. 'O Lord,' I prayed. 'I don't have anything. No money. . .no friends. Christians here won't accept me. I'm not a missionary with a home board, so I have no support either from there or here. Please help me. Please keep me sane.'" Olson seems obsessed with the "home board," as do the local missionaries who so unfortunately ostracized him. "You won't obey them," his friend, a local MK his age, tells him, "They told you to go back to

the States, join the mission, then come here and work." The sending function resides with the church not with the mission agency. Bruchko, despite his avowed independence, had enough of the sending function at work in his ministry to support him at crucial moments. Ironically, one day the Motilone would become, in essence, his sending church, as foreshadowed in another moment of discouragement where he lamented, "And after three years I had no money, no mission board to buy my ticket home. In fact, the only place in the world where I was sure of getting something to eat was in the jungle, with the Motilones."

The sending function of the local church is important if only for the fact that it is an idea that originated with God. Long before the Jesuits emerged as a religious order, long before OMF was founded by Hudson Taylor, long before Keith Green's Last Day Ministries, long before Bruchko pined away for a "home board," there was the church, exercising its sending function. Saul, or as we've come to call him Paul, had studied as a Pharisee under Gamaliel. He had commercial skill as a tentmaker (literally). On the Damascus Road, he became a follower of Christ and the Lord Himself prophesied over him that "he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles." He began to preach immediately, was treated with suspicion by the disciples at Jerusalem, and then finally taken under wing by Barnabas. When exactly in all of this did Paul become an *apostle*? In Acts 9:27, it's written that "Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles." So apparently at this point, he's not an apostle, even though he went throughout Jerusalem as he had at Damascus, "speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord" (Acts 9:28). In Chapter 11, after Peter (not Paul) is the first to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, we read that Barnabas retrieves Saul from Tarsus and brings him to Antioch. They make a trip to Jerusalem to deliver a collection for the famine that the prophet Agabus had predicted. They were apparently in Jerusalem to witness the arrest and miraculous release of Peter, but then we read "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark" (Acts 12:25). At this point, Paul is still called Saul, he's still tailing Barnabas, and while on a "mission," it was really the delivery of a financial gift. But then we come to Acts 13:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they

went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (v. 1-4).

From here on out, Saul's name is Paul (an interesting observation but necessarily a decisive one.) In Acts 14, while Paul and Barnabas were at Iconium, we are told that "the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some the apostles" (v. 4). This is an apparent reference to Paul and Barnabas, now designated apostles. At Lystra, when the historian Luke (i.e. author of Acts) describes the misguided reception of the missionary team, we read: "But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes." Now it's official: Paul is an apostle, as is Barnabas. It's the first usage of the term, and it all hinged on the moment, recorded in Acts 13, when they were sent out by the church at Antioch.

From the above passage, we can make the following observations:

- The church at Antioch included "prophets and teachers," among which Saul was numbered. No mention is made of apostles.
- These church leaders were simply "ministering to the Lord and fasting." In other words, they were not necessarily contemplating Great Commission obligations.
- There is no evidence that Barnabas and Saul were volunteering for missionary service. The voice of the Holy Spirit seems to come, as it were, out of the blue. The modern pattern of "volunteerism" is for an individual or a couple, like John and Susan Smith did originally, to sense a call from God and then approach their elder board for confirmation. In Saul's case, the call came to the elder board.
- The Holy Spirit's call in Acts 13 is actually directed to the church, not to Barnabas and Saul. In other words it is a call to "send" issued to the church, not a call to "go" issued to Barnabas and Saul. Certainly, the call to "go" is implied in the call to "send." We presume that Barnabas and Saul are free agents who must subsequently decide their own obedience.
- We see the double action of sending: the Holy Spirit sends AND so does the church: "they were sent out by the church at Antioch."
- Subsequent to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the church leaders "fasted and prayed and laid their hands on [Barnabas and Saul.]" This suggests a formality and an officiality.
- And of course, "laying on of hands" is extremely significant. This practice has a long standing in Judaism and in every expression of Christianity. It presupposes that there is a authority (or a bless-

ing, or the Holy Spirit) resident in a larger entity like the church that is conferred upon, transferred to, or delegated to the smaller entity like the missionary. Barnabas and Saul not only have the church's blessing to preach the Gospel but also her authority. They have been "set apart."

The word *apostle* is a Greek form that would eventually become the Latin version *missionary*. Not surprisingly, it bears the same root meaning: "sent one"—from *apostolos*, "messenger, person sent forth," from *apostellein* "send away, send forth," from *apo-* "from" + *stellein* "to send." The word "missionary" of course doesn't appear in the New Testament except as added Chapter Headings: i.e. "First Missionary Journey," "Second Missionary Journey," "Third Missionary Journey." Paul didn't carry the label missionary; but he was called an apostle, because he was a "sent one." By the time Paul is writing his letters to various churches—what would become the Pauline Epistles of the canonized New Testament—his apostleship seems to have outgrown the stature and historical role afforded to his teammate Barnabas, or to modern missionaries like Bruce Olson or John and Susan Smith. His witness of the resurrected Lord, either as recorded in Acts 9, Galatians 2, or II Corinthians 12 ("third heaven") ascribe to him a spiritual authority whereby he can belatedly join the original twelve. Nonetheless, Paul's original linkage to the word apostle is simply because he was "sent out" from Antioch.

It is from the notes of Robert Blincoe, U.S. Director of Frontiers, that I first learned of the Jewish background of the concept of apostle. This is the perspective that Barnabas and Saul would have carried into their ministry, and still remains as our biblical model. The Hebrew word, a common one, was *shaliakh*: "The messenger arrives as though the one who sends had himself arrived." It was used of messengers sent out by kings. Barnabas and Saul were beset by any number of troubles and received more than one vexing and violent reception. But when they stood before a crowd at Iconium or Lystra, they knew that it was as if the King of Kings and the Church at Antioch were there. John and Susan Smith often felt lonely, small and inconsequential in Taiwan. That's understandable but unfortunate. All along, with the Holy Spirit's calling and your church's commission, the Smiths were *shaliakh*, *apostles*, and sent-ones.

When I left for India in 1993—still unmarried at the time—I was brought before the congregation on a Sunday morning. I was privileged to be joined by two other people, a couple, dear friends who were being sent at the same time to the Arab World. The pastor called the elders up to the platform. These men stood behind us and as we all went to prayer I felt the solid clasp of many of their hands on my shoulders, arms, and head. They laid hands on me. Someone in the audience took a photo of this moment. I

took this photo with me to India. In addition, our Deacon of Outreach had printed up my commission on a nice piece of paper. After the service, congregants—family and friends—came forward and signed it. I also took this paper with me to India. While I kept this photo and this commission hidden from my Indian friends and from the Indian government, I pulled it out and every once in a while and looked at it, particularly during periods of discouragement. I was not alone. I had authority. I took confidence. But here's a significant question: does the "laying on of hands" have strictly a psychological, confidence-building effect, or is there possibly a more mystical understanding of this time-honored practice? Catholic novelist Flannery O'Connor tried to understand "mystery" at work in her characters. She once commented, "the meaning of the story does not begin except at a depth where adequate motivation and adequate psychology and the various determinations have been exhausted." The fact of the matter is that on numerous occasions in the New Testament, authority, like grace, is presented as a type of divine commodity, bestowed in all actuality upon those who minister in Christ's name. Jesus Himself was recognized as "teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:29). He did not simply project confidence; He actually possessed authority. The encounter with the paralytic of Matthew 9 centered around whether He possessed the authority to forgive sins as well as the authority to heal infirmities. "But when the crowds saw this," we read, "they were awestruck and glorified God, who had given such authority to men" (Mt. 9:8). Jesus was the man. God possessed the authority. God conferred it upon Jesus. Jesus used it in ministry. The result was the glorifying of God. One chapter later, "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness (10:1). The Great Commission itself begins in the context of authority: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go *therefore* and make disciples. . . . (Mt. 28:18-20). That one word *therefore* almost acts like a laying on of hands. In Revelation 11:3, the Lord identifies two witnesses and sends them out to prophesy. They are given *something* as part of their sending, but it is a word which is missing in the Greek text. The NIV translation ignores this gift and just says that the witnesses are "appointed." The NLT and NKJV supply the word "*power*." The gift of power would be in keeping with how Keith Green and Bruce Olson understand going. But the NASB uses the word *authority*: "And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

The sending function of the church is also highlighted in Paul's letter to the Romans:

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" (Rms. 10:9-14).

Paul the logician links together a number of actions or events—each one prior and necessary to the next one. The final result is the salvation of the Lord, but the progression is: be saved ← call on ← believe ← heard ← preached to ← sent. If we reversed the direction of the progression, it would like this:

sent → preached to → heard → believe → call on → be saved.

It's obvious according to this passage, that sending is the bottom line. It is the primary cause. It sets the entire glorious progression in motion. By implication and juxtaposition, the "beautiful feet" belong more to the senders than they do to the preachers.

## What Sydney Needs, Part II

Sydney is a confident person by nature. She also knows that she has the blessing and affirmation of her family and church friends. Perhaps most importantly, she has been trained to understand that whenever she opens God's Word to speak or teach from it, she is speaking with the full authority of the inspired Scriptures. She is "not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" and also to the East African (Rms 1:16).

But is it possible that Sydney is arriving in East Africa with less authority in ministry than she could have had if her church had chosen to look beyond "adequate motivation and adequate psychology" and erred on the side of mystery? True, the Lord does seem to grant *power* to his witnesses, but his *authority* seems to be mediated through his

Church. Would Sydney the laid-hands-upon, Sydney the sent-one, Sydney the *shaliakh*, Sydney the missionary be a significantly more effective minister than Sydney the civil engineer with a penchant and skill for Gospel-witnessing? I am going to argue, yes, but I do so on the basis of mystery.

However we understand the *laying-on-of-hands*, a commission from your church will greatly encourage Sydney's vision and accountability. Everyone appreciates Sydney's desire to evangelize and make disciples while she is working in East Africa, but no one really expects it of her. In other words, your church expects Sydney to be faithful and honest in her work. You expect her to live a moral life. And, yes, you expect her to be as active in Christian witness and service as she would be if she had a civil engineering job in the States and membership in your church. In fact, you might even expect her to be less active in ministry. While the needs in East Africa may be greater, the ready-made opportunities for ministry are limited. The demands of work and of simply living will be higher, and rather than availing herself of a volunteer slot in a well-oiled church ministry program, Sydney will have to go out and entrepreneur her own ministry opportunities. That may require more energy than we have a right to ask of her. It will be natural for ministry to gravitate to the back burner of Sydney's mind. She might look back on it as a "neat part of her time in East Africa," but the passion will have dissipated. There will be nothing at stake in the success or failure of any Bible study that she might teach or evangelistic outreach she might organize. If Sydney is sent to East Africa with a commission, she will have been forced to come up with a vision first. What does she imagine the Lord wants to do in East Africa through her? Does she have the faith to believe it will come to pass? And then, with a commission in her hand, she has a standard against which to work faithfully. What has she done in this past week to help fulfill her commission? What about this past month, or this past year?

This whole article that I am writing about the fictional Sydney has grown out of an actual event. A couple whom we have known from our church have chosen to take a secular job in West (not East) Africa. They leave in two months. Prior to taking this job, they had been pursuing membership in an established mission agency, raising support from many churches, including our own. It was a difficult choice for them to make, which path to take to West Africa, but many—including the leadership of our church—have affirmed them in their new path. One day, the husband called me. For all the assurance he had, and for all the financial security he had in his new job, he said, "I'm going to miss the prayer support and the accountability." He asked if there was provision for membership in Eden Vigil, the missions project of which I'm director, whereby we could provide accountability and foster prayer support for him. Eden Vigil is scrambling around this request, but

so is, and so much more importantly is, our church, Faith Evangelical Free Church of Manhattan, KS. Board membership is not what's important; a church commission is.

Sydney, to lapse again into the conceptual, will find only limited accountability in her company. They of course will be keenly interested in how she performs in her job and how she contributes to the bottom line. She will have annual performance and salary reviews. But they won't necessarily care about how she's doing outside office hours (though admittedly companies do seem more mindful of employees that they ask to work as expatriates.) Certainly, the company won't be interested in Sydney's faithfulness in her missional goals. Those are decidedly extra-curricular. Sydney may start attending a local church in East Africa, but for however welcome she may be and well-appreciated, she'll likely remain an outsider. East African Christian culture wouldn't presume to hold her accountable. Sydney needs what my friends were asking for. On a regular basis, someone possessing both care and authority, needs to ask Sydney, "How are you doing?" How is Sydney doing spiritually, emotionally, physically, and socially? How is she progressing on her goals? Depending on her answers, the next questions can be: "What do you need? How can we help? Do you need help problem-solving your obstacles?" The two goals of this type of accountability is member care and ministry effectiveness. John and Susan Smith knew this accountability from OMF and their home church. Sydney is going to miss out on it, something which can be corrected with only a couple of handy mechanisms implemented on her behalf. But those mechanisms we tend to reserve for recognizable missionaries.

Prayer letters also seem to be a reserved mechanism. Imagine that two printed, mass-mailed letters arrive in your mailbox on the same day in early December. One is from a friend from your home church who moved two states over. The other is also from a friend, also from your home church, also recently moved, but she is a recognizable missionary who is now in Pakistan. Both letters contain Christmas greetings. Both envelopes contain a recent family photo with the names of the children printed out in overlay. As for the news, both friends have been going through a hard time. Both request prayer. One we recognize as a "Christmas Letter." The other is a "Missionary Prayer Letter." The main difference between these two letters is really the expectations of you who receive the letters and what those expectations "allow" your correspondents to do with and in those letters. A Christmas letter, even if we ignore its holiday appellation, can only come out once a year. In other words, your stateside friend could send personal correspondence and e-mail, but a printed, mass-mailing that is sent out more than once a year, or on any other occasion than Christmas, would seem strange. Additionally, your stateside friend can only mail to those of you in your church whom he has known personally. Your rec-

ognizable missionary can mail prayer letters to mere acquaintances and even to those strangers who joined the church after she left for Pakistan but who want to be a part of your church's missions program. Your stateside friend will likely only share one or two general prayer requests. A Christmas letter is meant for information, whereas a missionary prayer letter focuses on a sizeable list of very specific prayer requests, the stories acting as background information for them. In addition, all of the Christmas letter writer's stories and prayer requests will likely focus on him and his family, whereas the missionary prayer letter writer has the freedom to introduce you to others (Pakistanis) and request prayer for them as well.

It will be strange for Sydney to send you anything more than a Christmas letter.

J. O. Fraser is the famous missionary among the Lisu people of Myanmar and Southwest China. His ministry consisted of trekking from one isolated mountain village to another. At one point in his ministry, as chronicled in his biography *Mountain Rain*, Fraser is puzzled why the church in one particular remote village is so vibrant, while the church in the village he has chosen as his home base of operations struggles. He is rarely able to visit the remote village whereas his preaching ministry in his home village is so busy. He suddenly realizes that precisely because he is unable to visit the other village as often as he would like, he actually prays for it *more* than what he prays for his home church. His prayer ministry for the Lisu bears more fruit than his preaching ministry, or rather, as he concedes, his preaching ministry bears no fruit apart from prayer. "We often speak of intercessory work as being of vital importance," Fraser writes in a letter back to the U.K. "I want to prove that I believe this is actual fact by giving my first and best energies to it as God may lead. I feel like a business man who perceives that a certain line of goods pays better than any other in his store, and who purposes making it his chief investment." But Fraser is an evangelist. There is work to be done in addition to the work of prayer. Fraser attends to his own prioritization of prayer, but he also actively recruits from others, so that he might be freed up to preach. Almost the totality of the writing that we have of J. O. Fraser is in the form of prayer letters sent back to the Church in Great Britain. "It is indeed necessary for me to go around among our Lisu, preaching, teaching, exhorting, rebuking, but the amount of progress made thereby depends almost entirely on the state of the Spiritual Tide in the village—a condition which you can control upon your knees as well as I." In recruiting his prayer circle, Fraser demonstrated more than just a belief in the power of concerted or multiplied prayer; he showed an insight into the sending function of the missionary enterprise. Once he wrote his prayer circle:

I will not labour the point: you will see from what I am saying that I am not asking you just to give

'help' in prayer as a sort of side-line, but I am trying to roll the main responsibility of this prayer-warfare on you. I want you to take the BURDEN of these people upon your shoulders. I want you to wrestle with God for them. I do not want so much to be a regimental commander in this matter as an intelligence officer. I shall feel more and more that a big responsibility rests upon me to keep you well informed. The Lord Jesus looks down from heaven and sees these poor, degraded, neglected tribespeople. 'The travail of His soul' was for them too. He has waited long. Will you not do your part to bring in the day when He shall 'be satisfied'? Anything must be done rather than let this prayer-service be dropped or even allowed to stagnate.

The spiritual warfare surrounding Sydney's East Africans is no less fierce than that of the J.O. Fraser among the Lisu. On a regular basis in the Christian life we are confronted with what we believe about prayer and its efficacy. Is regular, well-informed, faith-filled prayer something that Sydney needs? Then, just because she isn't a recognizable missionary is no reason for us to deny her that prayer support.

### **Sending Services: the Role of the Mission Agency**

Sydney is not a recognizable missionary. But OMF, Christar, or Eden Vigil are recognizable mission agencies. A mission agency, even without Sydney, Jason, William, or Amber joining it as a member, can still provide enough recognizability to the situation to spark and facilitate the sending function of the local church. To do this, the mission agency will be asked to restructure itself significantly more than Sydney or your church, but it is decidedly possible so long as the mission agency discovers a renewed sense of its *agency*—that it is a servant *through* which others work. In the end, mission agencies don't *do* missions; missionaries do, and sending churches do. Mission agencies will be asked to be more thorough-going in their *through*-ness. I imagine a suite of service that we can call "Sending Services."

The company that hired Sydney and is sending her overseas to East Africa contracted out many of their services to other companies. For example, they used a head-hunting firm to recruit, evaluate, and hire Sydney in the first place. A moving company is putting together a shipping container of her goods. A real estate office in the country's capital is even now seeking a suitable apartment for her. Insurance, retirement funds, and other human resources services have also been contracted out. Sydney is not a "member" of any of those outside companies, but she

is the beneficiary. Neither did she pay directly for any of those services; her company did.

Sending Services are a portfolio of services that a mission agency can offer an unrecognizable missionary and her sending church. Sydney and your church can pick and chose which combination of services would best serve the sending function of your church, which ones would best maximize the Kingdom-value of Sydney's overseas life and ministry. The church would then pay for those services. This would be the closest that we would come to the prevailing financial definition of *missionary support*, but obviously wouldn't, and couldn't, involve her salary. But we'll look at mechanisms again shortly. For now, let's brainstorming what types of Sending Services could be availed by your church:

### 1. *Missionary Evaluation: suitability*

Obtaining membership in a mission agency has traditionally been a rigorous affair. Candidates must submit confidential references, and then those references are asked for references. Doctrinal orthodoxy is tested. Sometimes psychological instruments are used, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. Interviews with experienced missionary leaders are extensive. There is a crucial bottom-line question: "Is this person a suitable candidate for missionary service?" The process is not fool-proof. For example, it rejected the young Bruce Olson. On other occasions, it lets someone through who is greatly harmed or who does great harm on the mission field. But missions candidacy is a good faith effort. Your church, the missionary, and the mission agency are all trying to recreate that moment in Acts 13 when they agree together that the Holy Spirit has spoken: "Set apart for Me this person for the work to which I have called them." If Sydney is going to be *shaliakh*—that is, speak as if your church was there speaking for itself—then your church will want to hold its missionary commissions very dear. An outside Sending Services consultant will confirm for you what you've already suspected regarding Sydney: she's very suitable for missionary service. But to tell you the truth, missionary evaluation will reveal some things about William which if left unidentified would trouble him and others once it is subjected to the rigors of cross-cultural service. Evaluation is a moment for William to seek some healing and maturation, but not for him to go to the mission field with your church's commission.

### 2. *Missionary Evaluation: training*

Missionary evaluation extends beyond suitability. Even a perfectly suitable candidate like Sydney will have certain "holes" in her skill sets. Missionary evaluations are not only descriptive; they are prescriptive. Mission agencies use them to advise the individual missionary in ways they can prepare or train for greater effectiveness. For example,

Sydney does not have a natural proclivity for learning second languages. Neither will her company send her to a formal language school, Sydney's preferred learning style. Consequently, Sydney would benefit from some language acquisition training, whereby she could learn how to "pick up" the language informally through purposeful interactions in her new community.

### 3. *Missionary Training*

Sending Services can often supply training directly to Sydney. For example, there is a sizeable population of Muslims in her new city, even in her own office. She's never had exposure to Muslims. Sending Services offers a whole training package in how to share your faith with Muslims. On other occasions, drawing on the mission agency's network, Sending Services would facilitate the training. For example, for Sydney's language acquisition needs, Sending Services could advise her to take a two-week course offered at Missionary Training International in Colorado Springs, but instead suggests that she takes a one-week intensive course offered in Swahili in Nairobi, Kenya.

### 4. *Strategic Ministry Planning*

How well does Sydney know the ministry situation in her new home? Does she know where to look? Does she know what questions to ask? Experienced church-planters know that the *survey stage* of a new project is an important phase. A humble church-planter cultivates the attitude of a learner. What is Sydney's people group? What are their felt needs? Sending Services may already possess an extensive knowledge of a local situation, but if not, can assist in the research. Sending Services can help Sydney design a ministry plan suitable for her unique situation: she's a worker in a secular job who wants to have a missional presence in her community. Sending Services can help her strategize. "Where do I begin?" is a crucial question; Sydney shouldn't leave for East Africa without at least that question answered.

### 5. *Communication for the Sending Church*

The Sending Church must understand and embrace what Sydney is hoping to do missionally in East Africa. Sydney won't be able to avail herself to the normal set of recognizable missionary communication devices. "We are John and Susan Smith and we are missionaries in Taiwan with OMF." There is a lot of prefabricated understanding packed into that statement of Sydney's parents. "I'm raising support in order to be a missionary." There's a lot of assumptions—almost all of them perfectly founded—in that statement too. But Sydney has some explaining to do. Sending Services can help Sydney write and publish the supporting material which will make your church not only comfortable, but enthusiastic, about adding her to your church's "missionary rolls" by granting her a bona fide

commission. Sydney may not have to raise monthly financial support, but she does need to raise significant prayer support. Sending Services can also consult with your church how best to conduct a commissioning service for Sydney.

Once Sydney is on the field, she and your church may wish to avail yourselves to these other services:

#### 6. *Prayer Letter Services*

On an agreed-upon schedule, Sending Services will collect from Sydney stories, prayer requests, and photos and publish them in the form of a prayer letter. This would be sent out to an electronic (e-mail) list of addresses, a list which Sending Services maintains in a database for Sydney. Once a year (Christmas?!), a paper letter is sent out which includes a new photo prayer card. Sydney's smile can be posted there on the refrigerator next to her parents, just like she was for all those years growing up. A prayer letter which comes out on Sending Services stationery from a Sending Services' address won't seem strange to your church. It will seem recognizable. In Jason's case, who is going to a closed and hostile Muslim country, once his situation is explained to his prayer partners during pre-departure, no mention of the Sending Services' name or address need even be made. Jason needs prayer ever as much as Sydney does, who needs prayer ever as much as her parents do. We can figure out the mechanism to encourage and inform this prayer support.

#### 7. *Accountability and Reporting*

Before she leaves for East Africa, Sending Services will ask Sydney to recruit three accountability partners. (Sending Services itself will supply a fourth spot.) One of these people should be her missions supervisor at her sending church (e.g. your Missions Committee chair, Deacon of Outreach, Missions pastor, etc.) Another person should be an older mentor of her same gender, in this case, a woman. The third person could be a trusted friend, preferably closer to Sydney's age. Once a quarter, Sending Services will collect a report from Sydney asking basic questions about her personal well-being, including spiritually, and her progress on work and ministry goals. The report will also ask, "Is there anything you need from your Sending Community?" These reports will then be distributed to each of the other three accountability partners. At that point, each partner can act on the report as each is led by the Lord. Sending Services may advise the accountability partners regarding issues of member care and missionary effectiveness that it sees in the reports.

#### 8. *On-field Visits*

There may be special occasions, or even a standing annual plan, for Sydney to be visited in East Africa by a trained missiologist and spiritual director.

#### 9. *Financial Services for Non-profit Ministries*

During the course of her ministry, Sydney may accrue ministry-related expenses which she can't afford to pay for out-of-pocket. Maybe a project develops around her which requires fund-raising. Many times, financial gifts can be sent directly to Sydney. But other times—either for the sake of convenience of collection and distribution, or for the sake of legality, or for the issuing of tax-deductible receipts—it is advisable that ministry donations come *through* a Sending Service.

Once Sydney returns from East Africa,

#### 10. *Debriefing*

In May 2007, my wife and I returned from India in less than healthy shape. My wife has written up our story as a co-author of the book *Expectations and Burn-out* (William Carey Library, 2010). One of the most positive events which contributed to our recovery was the debriefing that Christar offered. Four times a year, Christar gathers its newly-returned missionaries for a program called *ReTread*. Missionaries get a chance to tell their stories to each other—both the successes and the failures. They meet with experienced leaders. They develop a plan for the next months, including for whatever transitions await them. Debriefing is an invaluable service and mission agencies are honing their skill at providing it. Sending Services could supply this debriefing to Sydney, or arrange for it, or at least remind the sending church of its importance. Eden Vigil performed this service two years ago. A friend in our church had a daughter who was serving as a youth pastor in a church up in Iowa. This young woman was on a short-term team in Haiti when the earthquake hit. While none of the team members were injured in the quake, they were traumatized by what they witnessed and by their experience of helplessness in coming to the aid of others. My local friends prevailed on me to contact the church in Iowa. I was able to explain to the pastor the importance of keeping the team together for at least a full day of debriefing. The church mobilized local resources but also informed me that they wouldn't have thought about debriefing unless I had presented its importance to them. Sydney will need debriefing even if her experience in East Africa is uniformly wonderful. But in times of burn-out or crisis, debriefing is indispensable.

#### **The Mechanism of Sending Services**

Perhaps you've seen a breakdown of the missionary support figure that Sydney's parents receive with OMF. Your church contributes monthly to this support figure, as do a handful of other churches and a good number of individual donors as well. But once this money is received by OMF, it is distributed between a number of different cate-

gories. The largest category is the Smiths's salary. After the requisite tax and Social Security deductions are made, this money is forwarded on to John and Susan. The next largest categories are for the Smith's medical insurance and for their retirement accounts. In Sydney's case, salary, insurance, and retirement are all paid by her company. John and Susan also raise monthly money for their Work Fund. This acts as an expense account for the Smiths. When they have ministry-related expenses (travel, equipment, office rental, postage, literature, etc.), they can file an expense report and get reimbursed. As any church budget indicates, it takes money to equip a ministry. For Sydney, her job-related expenses are covered by her company. But as an unrecognizable missionary, Sydney will have expenses that her company won't cover. For example, she doesn't have a Work Fund from which to pay for prayer letters. Finally, of the Smith's monthly support, about 10-13%, depending on the agency (and I've not inquired of OMF), goes to cover the administrative and supervisory costs of the services that OMF provides for the Smiths and their supporting churches.

Even for recognizable missionaries like the Smiths, it can be said that they are already paying money for "sending services," or rather, raising money to cover the cost of sending services. For that matter, occasionally a traditional missionary's salary from his or her tentmaking job is sufficient enough to meet their salary, insurance, and retirement, that they raise only the funds they need for a work fund and administrative costs. They are members of a missions agency, but they avail themselves only to the sending services similar to the ones listed above.

A Sending Services model would seek to accommodate the sending function of your church for such missionaries as Sydney, Amber, Jason, and William. A mission agency would have to identify a suite of services that they are willing and able to provide for missionaries who are not members of their organization. They would have to define these offerings in much more detail than what I have mentioned above. Then the agency would have to do the thorough and exacting work of pricing those services. They must obviously cover their own costs. They can also build in a reasonable "profit" into their pricing, money which as a Non-Profit Organization they can use to fund the fulfillment of their mission, bringing the Gospel to the least-reached. Of course, the pricing of Sending Services will also have to be mindful of "what the market can bear."

Sending Services will package each offering up into a suite of services, or a portfolio. Sydney and your church would look at the suite and decide which ones would truly maximize Sydney's ministry and which would serve the sending function of the church.

A Memo of Understanding (MOU) would then be drawn up between Sydney, your church, and Sending Services. The mission agency is certainly not disinterested in

who their clients might be. Sydney's geographical place of ministry might be outside the mission agency's focus. (For example, OMF, which began as China Inland Mission, continues to focus on Asia.) William's evaluation might raise enough red flags that the Sending Services wouldn't want to be part of his accountability team, even if the church wants to move forward. So the MOU presupposes a good faith decision by all parties entering the agreement. The MOU would outline the chosen services, the payment for those services, and the responsibilities of each party for any particular service. If you review the above list of services, you'll see that it is the rare case where Sending Services does something unilaterally. Each service represents a partnership whereby Sydney or your church works *through* the Sending Services to promote the sending function in the missionary enterprise.

Sydney may actually make enough money from her company salary that she wants to pay Sending Services directly, but this is inadvisable, and I'm not sure Sending Services would enter into the MOU if Sydney and not your church were the client. We must honor the sending function of the local church, as explained biblically above. Consequently, the MOU must include a specific sending church. Money that comes to Sending Services will be donated by the church's mission budget. The full amount can also be made up with donations by other churches and/or individuals. Tax-deductible receipts can be issued by Sending Services.

I can imagine that a one-time set-up or association fee will be necessary. Afterwards, the pricing for each service should be calculated on a monthly basis, so that donations are also made monthly. In other words, contributions from the church budget to Sydney's missionary service will look no different than those made for her parents.

The MOU can be reviewed regularly and revised as agreed-upon.

### **What the Sending Church Needs**

Once, many years ago, my wife and I were handed a sizeable financial gift by our local church for use in our ministry. I may have demurred, but our pastor called us up short, looked me straight in the eye and said, "You might not need to receive this, but we need to give it." You could almost see him pleading on behalf of the spiritual health of his flock. To whom much is given, much is expected. The Bruchkos of the missions world may sidestep the sending church. Multinational corporations like Sydney's company may eliminate the need for *missionary support* as financially defined. But your church needs to send. There is no other path of obedience available than for your church to take up its sending responsibilities before God. And I strongly believe that this sending must be relational and intimate. There is no better picture than the laying on of

hands. Your congregation knows Sydney. She came from among you. And now there she is standing up in front of the whole church on the Sunday morning of her commissioning. She has sweat on her upper lip because while she's a great civil engineer, she's a nervous public speaker. But then at one point, the elders all place a hand on her shoulder, forearm or back. There is human touch. Your church, even for its own spiritual health, needs this degree of familiarity with the missionary enterprise.

Your church, as Sydney's sending church, also needs a means of communicating to the congregation about Sydney's ministry. But now—what with Sydney's commissioning service and with her sending service fees appearing in the church's missions budget—most of Sydney's unrecognizability issues have become moot. What is different at all about how Sydney appears to your church? She doesn't belong to a mission agency, but for most congregants, that fact wouldn't even register.

Your church also needs to “do right by” Sydney, by which I mean you need to love her well. This is certainly true if you offer her a commission, but it would also be true if she were simply one of your own flock that you've wished well as she leaves your immediate embrace. Sydney, out of sight, is not out of mind. There are churches who have created the internal structures whereby they can provide all the sending services that their missionaries might need. Often these are very large churches who take on the entirety of their missionary's support and who are staffed by experienced ex-missionaries. In the case of the sending services listed above, your church may not have the expertise, experience, resources, or time with which to sufficiently serve Sydney in these areas. The portfolio of sending services allow your church to pick and choose when the sending function would best be accomplished *through* an agency.

Finally, your church needs to change with the times. Sydney, Jason, William, and Amber have all looked out on their prospects and have concluded that times are different than when Sydney's parents first headed out to Taiwan with OMF, just as the Smiths knew that their times were different than when Hudson Taylor first went to China with CIM. The sending function of the local church has not changed since New Testament times, but sending mechanisms have—all of which leads us to our last, and most important question: what do the least-reached need?

### **What the Least-Reached Need**

In 1792, the shoemaker William Carey published a tract entitled *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. The title, in keeping with the fashion of the time, was thoroughly informative. Carey's goal was “the conversion of the heathens,” something which today would be more sensitively stated as “reaching the least-reached.” Carey also understood that

the sending function of the church was part of the “obligations of Christians.” But the main purpose of Carey's inquiry is summed up in the phrase “use of means.” The Catholic Church had been experiencing its “Golden Age of Missions” complete with Jesuit *missionem*. Protestants however, except for notably the Moravians and the Danish Halle Mission, had not ventured cross-culturally with the Gospel. Carey's tract includes a survey of the people groups of the world, including “Mahometans,” and the status of the Gospel among them. What *means* would the church use to reach them for Jesus? When William Carey sailed for India in 1793, it was the start of a career in ministry that would mean a lot for the people of West Bengal. But the emergence, as a result of Carey's urging and example, of the London Missionary Society and the American Baptist Missionary Society would mean something for countless nations and generations of the least-reached.

The Gospel is brought to the least-reached through *means*, and means change with the times. The least-reached of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are in no less in need of the Gospel. The Gospel is no less in need of *means*. “How will they preach unless they are sent?” (Rms. 10:15).

The vast majority of the unbelieving world is cognizant of the Christian church's missionary enterprise, and they have rejected it. Now, they haven't necessarily heard the Gospel. What they've rejected is the enterprise and they've taken active steps to create structures—whether in their minds, their institutions, or their laws—to preclude the chance of actually hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ. We could say that these nations have identified the *means* by which the church has brought the Gospel and have devised obstacles by which to preclude or thwart those means. And so missionary visas have been denied. Missionaries have been persecuted. The missionary label has been enough to discredit anything that the missionary might say. Missionaries have been compartmentalized as “westerners,” or as “religious professionals,” so that what missionaries might say to them is dismissed as irrelevant. The least-reached are no less in need of the Gospel, and the Gospel must be preached, and preachers must be sent. If the least-reached are going to hear the Gospel, they need to hear it from people like Sydney. Sydney has a business visa, not a missionary one. She has shed certain of the baggage which troubles the non-believer. She speaks not from a position of power, but as a co-worker in the globalized economy. Sydney may have given up recognizability in her sending church, but she has found it among East Africans. They can understand and relate to a civil engineer working hard to earn her paycheck.

A sustained global economic downturn also has implications for the least-reached's chance to hear the gospel from sent preachers. Many North American churches have already begun to cut their missions budgets in the face of diminished giving. In essence, they can longer “afford” to

send as many missionaries as they have in the past. And yet, diminished giving doesn't excuse a church from its biblical responsibility to send. What it should encourage a church to do is problem-solve: what new *means* are out there for the financial sending of missionaries. Your church is essentially using Sydney's company to bring the Gospel to East Africa. Missionaries of William Carey's time used the East India Company's chaplaincy program to bring the Gospel to India. The Roman Army was used to spread the Gospel through the deployment of Christian soldiers in its ranks. For that matter, we could say that the apostle Paul used the Roman penal system to bring the Gospel to Rome.

But even in the best of economic times, considering the immensity of the unfinished task of bringing the Gospel to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation of each subsequent generation until the Lord's return, the great missionary enterprise requires "all hands on deck," and no opportunity left unexploited. I can't believe that I am exaggerating when I say that it would be a tragedy of eternal proportions if Sydney goes to East Africa as any thing less than a *shaliakh*, an apostle, a missionary.

The least-reached deserve no less a level of love. The Lord deserves no less a level of creative zeal.

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