

A SERVICE UPLIFTING INTERNATIONAL MISSION PERSONNEL

Use for...

- * Commissioning a missionary or celebrating a missionary sponsorship
- * Epiphany, when the ELCA celebrates global mission
- * Welcoming a visiting missionary
- * Encouraging young people to consider global mission as a vocation
- * Emphasizing this important ministry of the church and helping to recruit new missionaries.

As missionaries, ELCA pastors and lay people carry out God's mission in over 60 countries around the world. Through their work, mission personnel proclaim the good news of Christ to all—serve and advocate for people who are oppressed—and embrace the remarkable gifts of others as they walk together in global mission.

Suggestions for Gathering

Opening Hymn: WOV 779 “You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord”

Kyrie from Taiwan (found in *Global Liturgical Expressions*—see page 1)

Hymn of Praise: WOV 791 “Alabare”

Prayer of the Day:

Lord, Grant us all the missionary zeal of Paul, who even unto his last days concerned himself with the ongoing struggles of the fledgling church. Let us also boldly go and make disciples. Amen.

Suggestions for the Word

First Reading: Psalm 91

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 4:9-18

Gospel Acclamation: WOV 613 “Celtic Alleluia”

Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Sermon or reflection (see box)

Hymn of the Day: WOV 756 “Lord, You Give the Great Commission” or
LBW 381 “Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling”

The Prayers: LBW p. 37 Missionaries (139)

Suggestions for the Meal

Sanctus/Holy: “Santo, Santo, Santo” (found in *Global Liturgical Expressions: Sanctus, Amen, Gloria*—see page 1)

Communion Hymn: WOV 773 “Send Me, Jesus”

Suggestions for Sending

Benediction:

Leader: May the God of love, who loves us freely, strengthen us in our love for others;
may Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us, grant us grace to give our lives for others;
may the Spirit, who dwells in us, empower us to live for others.

People: Amen.

Source: *Worshipping Ecumenically* (see page 20)

Closing Hymn: WOV 754 “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ”

For More Ideas

See the annual Global Mission International Personnel Directory, inserted in the January-February Action Packet. For information on becoming or sponsoring an ELCA missionary, visit www.elca.org/dgm/.

Story for Sermon or Reflection

Christmas in Egypt

Rev. Dr. David and Karla Grafton, ELCA mission personnel in Egypt

In Egypt, Christmas trees are almost nonexistent. They do show up in December on street corners in areas where Westerners live, however. You can purchase a tall, spindly “Charlie Brown” Christmas tree for quite a sum, or use an artificial tree.

In 2001 we had just finished decorating our tree when the door bell rang. It was Ahmed, our taxi driver friend, with a seven-foot Christmas tree. “It is yours, Happy Christmas,” he said. “Can you come to *Iftar* tomorrow, Mr. David? Five o’clock?” Then he quickly waved a farewell and drove off. It was one of the biggest, greenest and bushiest Christmas trees I have ever seen in Cairo! This certainly cost a good deal of money for a man who makes less than 17 dollars a day to feed his family of six.

Ahmed is a Muslim from one of the poor areas of Cairo. Every evening he drives his taxi down the narrow, dirt-paved streets, ignoring pedestrians, cyclists with racks of bread on their heads, and children playing soccer with whatever object will roll. He is what sociologists label as the backbone of the social strata which supports the Islamic fundamentalists in Egypt: the poor, working class Egyptians who have no future. Yet, this man is no fundamentalist. He is no radical. He is a simple, loving man who shows his kindness by purchasing an expensive Christmas tree, an object which makes little sense to him in his world. He comes from a world which Western media imagines rock throwing, flag burning, death chanting, angry Arab Muslims. I am what Islamicists call in negative terms a *mubashir*—a missionary. We come from very different worlds. We have very different world views. And the world has put a wall between us.

Iftar is the meal that marks the breaking of the Ramadan fast at sundown each day. Once we had zigged-zagged our way through the dusty, chaotic streets we arrived at the building where he lives on the first floor and his brother’s family on the second. The goats and chickens live on the roof. We were invited into his small apartment where we sat on the floor of the bedroom. As it was close to sundown, plates of chicken and roast, trays of salads and bread were set before us. It looked delicious.

Within a matter of minutes the small, black and white television produced an image of the Citadel, the national fortress built by Saladin, on whose ramparts a cannon fires every sundown during Ramadan signaling the official end of the day’s fast. The cannon roared over the television and Ahmed said, “*Itfudal* [help yourself] Mr. David.” The feasting began.

It didn’t take long until our three children had lost interest in adult conversation and became interested in Ahmed’s children. As children do, they resorted to the language all children understand: playing games. To the delight of Ahmed’s family, they started by working out a version of “Duck, Duck, Goose” and then played a rousing game of “Hide and Seek.”

There we were, in the midst of a poor, Muslim section of Cairo, breaking the fast together, our children playing together. There was nothing more human, more genuine, more poignant to the Angelic host proclaiming, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth...” than the laughter of children and the delight of adults in conversation around the table. It was an encounter of what we usually paint in broad strokes: Arab and Westerner, Muslim and Christian, Islamic Fundamentalist and Christian Imperialist-Missionary. But those broad strokes almost always miss the reality of a true encounter.

I’ve never seen a segment like this on CNN. Glory to God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.

