

“...whom you sent to take care of my needs”

**As the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus, these churches sent short term teams to minister to missionary needs.**

### **European Getaways: Emmanuel Faith Community Church pampers women missionaries**

Men's Ministries at Emmanuel Faith Community Church (EFCC) in Escondido (San Diego), CA have had a long history of involving men in missions, such as through their “Men on a Mission” short term teams, which travel

overseas to do construction projects. Bev Amsbary, EFCC's Director of Women's Ministries, had a concern for likewise involving women in missions. She began wondering what kind of trips women in the church could take part in.

After consulting with EFCC's women missionaries, an idea evolved. What if EFCC rented a retreat center on the field, near clusters of EFCC missionaries,

and ran an event that pampered their missionaries for a weekend, while providing spiritual rejuvenation? EFCC's field missionaries applauded the idea and an event was born.

“Many of our missionaries work in difficult fields, such as in Europe and among Muslims,” says Amsbary. “It was a major goal of ours to encourage our women missionaries who don't normally receive a lot encouragement through their ministries.”

Thus far EFCC Women's Ministries have put on two of these events, the first in April 1998 in Malaga, Spain and the second in Amsterdam, Holland in May 2001.

In order to conduct the 2001 Holland event, Amsbary began the process of recruiting a team of twelve women who would each have a specific role, including a team leader, a crafts leader, teachers, worship leaders, a hospitality coordinator, a dining room hostess, a Power Point operator and a coordinator of baby care. “I could have hand picked those whom I thought would have done it best, but I wanted the team to be open to the entire church.”

The trip was advertised in the bulletin; initially 36 applied, “and God put the team together,” says Amsbary, who eventually did not need to pare down the applications. “For one reason or another, applicants chose to eliminate themselves.”

Next up was training for team members. Monthly meetings began a year before the trip and increased to 2-3 times per month closer to the time of the trip. At the meetings team members began praying for the trip. Training was given for how to teach a seminar. Those presenting seminars practiced their talks before the group. The team practiced the worship songs they would sing so as to

gain familiarity with them.

Other training involved how to relate easily to missionaries and the types of things they would talk about. As the women were planning to give missionaries foot massages, they received training on how to give such a massage and how to talk to someone (who is probably embarrassed about receiving a foot massage) while giving the massage.

Meanwhile Sue Lackey, an EFCC-supported missionary based in England, began handling logistics in Europe. She set the date and coordinated publicity, invitations, registration and the facility. Invitations went out to all EFCC missionary women working in Europe and North Africa. Lackey was also allowed to invite other women (not supported by EFCC) whom she knew and thought would benefit from the retreat. She kept the church updated on the number of registrations, so that the church could bring enough resources to the conference.

To cover costs of the retreat, team members raised their own support for their personal costs. EFCC-supported missionaries, it was decided, would pay for the cost of travel but would otherwise attend the event free. This cost was picked up by EFCC's missions budget. Those missionaries not supported by EFCC were asked to pay for their transportation costs and the costs of meals and lodging at the retreat. Some non-EFCC missionaries were able to secure scholarships to the event from their own home churches. Women's Ministries was responsible for covering the costs of resources (such as craft supplies, retreat booklets, gift bags, etc.). They were able to acquire many of the resources through donations of goods by people in the church.

And off the team headed to Amsterdam for a ten-day trip. They took suitcases full of supplies for the retreat, craft materials

and gifts such as Christian books. The team flew on a Monday, arrived on Tuesday and set up for the retreat on Wednesday and Thursday. The retreat started on Thursday afternoon and ran through Sunday lunch. The team packed up and spent the night at the retreat center on Sunday night, then spent three days in Amsterdam.

Forty women missionaries made their way to Amsterdam for this retreat. Speakers at the event were wives of EFCC pastors. Seminars were given on topics such as praying, maintaining a healthy marriage and developing a Power Point presentation. The missionaries were divided up in life stage groups and given time to talk amongst themselves openly about their lives. Team members gave foot and hand massages and hair and makeup makeovers. A tea party was a highlight of the event. The group went on day trips through the canals of Amsterdam.

Of the event, Sue Lackey notes "The retreat was a truly refreshing event. The EFCC team brought many gifts for us, but more importantly they brought love and care. There was always a listening ear or someone to pray with. The whole retreat was a real gift of love. We spend time enjoying one another, praying with one another and laughing together. We went home with wonderful memories and lots of books, music and others goodies. We felt very spoiled and cared for."

Amsbary has recently received the green light to hold the next women's missionary retreat in spring 2006, with the location to be announced. "We'll start taking applications for the trip in early 2005," she says. "We'll be going for the same purpose and will be looking for mature, servant-hearted women for the team."

While many churches may not have the financial resources to pull off the

same kind of retreat, Amsbary insists that most churches could duplicate a smaller scale version. "This event could be done for missionaries who work in the US," she notes. "And I think that many churches could find businesses or individuals who would be able to donate many of the supplies needed for such a retreat."

"The main idea is for your team to go in order to refresh and refuel missionaries, emotionally, spiritually and physically. Go to serve."

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### **Resort Retreats: Grace Chapel of Englewood, CO offers missionaries marriage and spiritual renewal retreats**

Grace Chapel in Englewood, CO is a church that has a deep love for Tunisia. It has developed a good relationship with many organizations ministering there as well as with key national Church leaders. And it has spearheaded the development of a network of American churches that focus on ministry to that nation.

Yet Grace Chapel is always asking what more it can do to advance the gospel among Tunisian Arabs. In such a creative access nation where missionaries work in low profile, local churches can not send in short term teams to build churches or openly hand out tracts. A key value for Grace Chapel is to seek input from the mission field regarding how the church can best serve.

The answer that emerged was for the church to conduct retreats that would refill missionaries' tanks and help make them more effective. Grace planned to field a team in March 2001 to conduct its first missionary-care-oriented short

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term trip: a marriage seminar.

Critical to pulling off such an event was finding a missionary already on-site to coordinate logistics within the country, particularly for security reasons. Such a coordinator was found and handled invitations to the event. He also took responsibility for securing a hotel that could accommodate the seminar and activities for missionaries' children. A resort hotel was chosen in the coastal city of Hammamet, not far from Tunis, the city where most missionaries in Tunisia work. The event was explained to the hotel as a marriage retreat for expatriate workers in the country and met with no resistance. Tunisia is a moderate Muslim country and allows expatriates to assemble for Christian events. The team came trained on what to (not) say while on-site, in the event that the room was being monitored in any way.

Because missionaries live on modest budgets, Grace wanted to make it easy for them to attend and so picked up the costs of the retreat for every missionary.

The only cost paid by missionaries was transportation to and from the event. Team members raised their personal trip costs and Grace's missions budget picked up the total cost of running the retreat.

Back in Denver, Grace began assembling its team. "God raised up the perfect team for us," says Neil Holsteen, a layman who attends Grace and coordinated the team. Eleven Grace members comprised the team. Seven team members, assisted by a few single missionaries, were dedicated to ministering to the 60 children (infant through high school age) who accompanied their parents. The other four team members led the marriage seminar, including Grace's then-missions pastor Dean Yoder who served as the event speaker. He also wrote the curriculum for the seminar. Dean's wife Ellen worked with a missionary on the field to lead worship.

Grace's team headed for Tunisia with suitcases full of toys and games for use with the children, and full of items

that missionaries in Tunisia can't easily access, such as peanut butter and Christian books.

The trip would last for two weeks, which included time for preparing for and running the three-day conference, going on prayer walks within the country and visiting missionaries.

The marriage

seminar began on a Friday night and ended on Sunday. It took place in a conference room, ran smoothly and was well received.

Children met in a building at the resort normally used for children's activities during the peak tourism season. The team came prepared to do a structured VBS-style event for elementary school-aged kids. The time was less structured for junior and senior high students.

Holsteen believes that much of their trips' success rests in the fact that the church did not attempt to impose its program on missionaries in Tunisia. "It's a strong value of ours to look to the field for guidance for our projects," he says. Also important has been the attention that the church has paid to programming for missionaries' children as well as for the adults.

Additionally, the church already had strong communication with several workers on the field before planning the events. This created a pool of potential attendees for the events.

"It's important to put on events like these in a nice facility, especially in a more security-conscious setting," says Holsteen. "If we had put on the event in a regular hotel where few if any westerners stay, it would have raised suspicion. But we held it in a hotel that regularly hosts conferences and caters particularly to tourists and expatriates, so we didn't stand out."

But when putting on such an event, Holsteen advises: "Be flexible. The first time you do such an event, from thousands of miles away you can plan the perfect event. But something will go wrong or be different than you expected."

"And remember, you can't start planning such an event too early!"