

As a first time itinerate missionary that is about 50% of the way done raising funds to head to the field there are copious amounts of thoughts that flow through my mind. One of the greatest is how my family will engage the Venezuelan culture. I am not just talking about how to communicate Christ, I mean how will we choose where to get our haircut? Who do you see to get the power turned on in your apartment, much less find an apartment to rent? The truth to these two questions and thousands more Angela and I have discussed is that gracefully enough for us AGWM has a way taking care of new missionaries to the field. But of course, I am human and my mind still simply wonders about the unknown.

I have a deeper point to ponder though. Before Angela, the boys and I ever get to Venezuela we will spend one year in Costa Rica at Cincel, a Spanish language school owned and operated by AGWM. There we will have the privilege to not only study Spanish but culture and other hot topics for a new missionary as well. The tuition that we have to raise is \$18,000. This is more than fair for the 5 of us for one whole year. Not to mention we can get college credit. Also the cost of putting us on the field in Caracas just for one month is \$7,023. That is all expense categories by the way, not our salary. So lets just say 1 year in Costa Rica at 7K a month = \$84,000 plus the \$18,000 of language school. Now we have an investment by churches and individual donors of \$102,000 for us to get to Venezuela, presumably fluent in Spanish and partially culturally apt. This does not include airline tickets, visas, and other costs of which I am not aware.

Please do not misunderstand me, I am not griping about the price tag or the burden of raising the funds. Honestly, the Lord's calling is on my family, and we chose to apply with AGWM fully knowing that A/G Missionaries have large budgets. So let us revisit the price tag again: \$102,000 in education expense by contributors to be able to linguistically engage a foreign culture with the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Wow! And Latin America has more A/G missionaries than any other field. Now think exponentially of the price tag. Here is the base camp thought I want you to come to on this mental journey: If contributors,

both churches and individuals are willing to give towards the Nelsons and many others to long-term engage in an overseas foreign culture, (i.e., World Missions), what expense are we willing to pay in our own church's city here in America where there are so many different subcultures?

Let me illustrate. I was invited for a missions service to over 105 churches in North Carolina alone in 2006. All of them support missionaries monthly and gave us an offering towards our ministry in Venezuela. I wonder what their real investment is into the subcultures of their city? It could be approached from many aspects. But here is what I saw. Most churches averaged 30-50 in attendance in the service. Most churches' adults were predominately white, middle class, and forty or above in age. Which brings me to the question of how are we engaging our culture? Just a thought, if a church says it is a missions minded church and financially supports missionaries but does not impact its city with the transformational power of God by way of salvation, is it really a missions minded church?

Some points to ponder

- What if a white church learned the black lingo, would it be missions or overcoming prejudices?
- What if a church rented an apartment in a housing project using it as a place where anyone could stop in for a light refreshment and conversation?
- What if for a Sunday School quarter a class explored the Qur'an as the text book and developed an apologetic against Islam?
- What if a church's next paid staff member spoke broken English, because they were the Spanish, Korean or German Pastor?
- What if we used the same principles in our local churches that we put into practice with our world missionaries? Us missionaries raise appropriate funds to be linguistically and culturally apt to engage unreached peoples with the Gospel. Now the church globally is growing exponentially as it has begun to reach out to itself. The return on investment has been more than profitable, it is fruitful.