

“Yes, Lord! Here am I. Send me.”

By Mary Ann Anderson

October 13, 2003

Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of my Missions Trip to Africa

This past September was the 25th anniversary of my departure for a short term mission trip to Maradi, Niger Republic, West Africa. In 1978 at the age of 21, I left my family, home and all that was familiar to me and set out for Africa with Sudan Interior Mission. The Lord had called me to career missionary service at a Missions Festival at Edina Baptist Church (now called Grace Church Eden Prairie) in 1972. In response to a powerful message one night, I went forward and said “**Yes, Lord! Here am I. Send me.**” I knew God was calling me to career missionary service.

In the years that followed, I began preparing by taking any courses in high school that would help me on the mission field. I studied French, thinking I would go to Africa, electronics, secretarial skills and studied English with a goal in mind of being able to communicate the Gospel effectively. I also read several missions books and was mentored by godly, missions-minded people in my church. A few years later, I had two major issues on my mind. What sort of job could I do on the mission field, other than being a nurse or teacher (I knew I was not suited for either of those)? And, since I didn't know if I would ever get married, how does a single woman cope with loneliness? To help answer these questions, the Lord led me to serve on a short term missions trip to Africa.

Short-term trips were not common at that time but I knew that for my experience to be most effective, I needed to go to serve--not explore. I did not want to use my trip to "check out missions and see if I like it." I already knew I was called and would be a career missionary. My goals for that missions trip were these:

1. Use my skills to serve the missionaries.
2. Observe what type of work missionary women did so I could determine what kind of training I needed for career service.
3. Learn how to cope as a single missionary.

When I left for Africa, I was both excited and afraid. After a brief time of orientation at the headquarters in New Jersey (most of which was given in an African accent I had not yet learned to understand), I was on my way.

My first night in the dry, semi-desert of Niger was full of all the initial shock of a first-timer in a Third World country. The heat rose from the ground in waves and there were swarms of strange insects I had never seen before--or at least not in huge sizes. The smells were pungent and unrecognizable. I didn't know if the drums I heard in the distance were friendly or not. The dinner conversation with the missionaries shifted from

what I was accustomed to — having worked at Midwest Challenge, a Christian drug rehabilitation center, where we often talked about drug addiction, prostitution and homosexuality — to diarrhea, police extortion and scorpions.

In my struggle to cope with everything new and strange, I found myself wanting to sleep all the time. In my sleep, I would happily dream about being home again. What a disappointment to wake up and find I was still in the heart of Africa. After several days of crying and begging to go home, God gave me another dream. I dreamt I was at home in my parent's house, but instead of being happy, I was weeping in misery because I knew I had disobeyed God by leaving Africa. My supporters stood around me and I begged them to send me back so I could faithfully finish my assignment. They told me it was too late, since I had disobeyed, I could not go back. Imagine the relief I felt that time when I woke up. I was still in Africa! I had not disobeyed and would now be able to serve the Lord and finish my assignment. I am not one to put much interpretation into dreams, but God used that dream to show me how horrible it would be to disobey His calling. Even though I knew He would extend forgiveness, grace and mercy, I would have missed His first and best choice for me. That message from God was a turning point and I never again to this day, wished I could quit and go home.

By God's grace, I made it through all the adjustments and served for 9 months. God was faithful and I learned many things which helped prepare me for career missionary service. My goals were met, primarily, learning how to cope as a single woman. I grew in intimacy with Lord in ways I never knew were possible. I learned that it did not matter if I was single or married, it only mattered that I walked with God. In my devotions the day before leaving for Africa, I read Psalm 63. Verse 1 says, "*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*" Toward the end of my term, during a time of deep prayer and dedication, I wrote the following:

My life goal is to become like Jesus Christ. First of all by knowing God and beholding His glory. Secondly, by allowing God to glorify Himself, any way He chooses, through my life and to decrease me. And third, by being good to all and having compassion on all He has made, to love others. It is through the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit that these things will be completed in my life at the day of Jesus Christ.

Mary Ann Hartzell
Miango, Nigeria, May 3, 1979

While in Africa, I met a group of Nigerian men and women serving with Calvary Ministries based in Nigeria. I shared with them my vision to return to help female

prostitutes (which was the ministry I had before going to Africa). I had observed that when these women came to Christ, they had a very difficult life. The church was not accepting, no man -- Christian or otherwise -- would ever marry them, and they would not be able to get a decent job to support themselves and their children. I shared my vision to begin a program to teach these women a cottage industry while living in a discipleship home and encouraging churches to accept these sisters in Christ into their fellowship. They also shared my vision and we prayed about this together.

A few months after returning home from my missions trip, I married Jeff Anderson. During our first 5 years of marriage, we prayed about where God would have us serve as career missionaries. The doors to return to Africa were closed to us. We desired to work among street people, drug addicts, prostitutes, prisoners, the destitute. While we searched for a mission board and prayed about where God would send us, we received mission training and our two children were born. By winter of 1985, we left for Manila, Philippines to serve with Action International Ministries. Today Jeff and I are still ministering and serving in Manila. We don't look back and we have no regrets. We pray that we will finish well the assignment that God has for us, where ever He wants us. Our response to God continues to be "**Yes, Lord! Here we are. Send us!**"

Recently while reading and praying through *Operation World*,* I learned that missionaries from Calvary Ministry and SIM International have begun an outreach ministry among prostitutes in Niamey, the capital of Niger. Did I, as a short-term missionary, have anything to do with it? Yes, if in no other way, through prayer.

What is the value of short term missions trips?

Jeff and I have spent many hours discussing this question and I even took a seminar to learn the answer. There is a trend these days toward short term trips, almost to the exclusion of career service. Because of this, we are striving to understand this trend and discover how to make it compatible with career service. However, it is crucial to understand that the day of career service is not over. If you hear someone say career missionaries are no longer needed, chances are they are not a career missionary — but one who does frequent short term trips or is not involved in missions at all. Not only is it biblical — the need for missionaries to move cross culturally, learn the local language and culture, and bring the Gospel — but it will not end until Jesus Christ returns.

Yes, a great deal of ministry can be done through local believers and short term missionaries, but not all of it. Just pray through *Operation World** every day for a year and you will read repeatedly about the needs that can only be filled by career missionaries. From my perspective as a career missionary, I believe the purposes of short term missions trips are the following:

1. Training for career service.
2. Provide an expertise or skill to assist missionaries in their ministry; such as preaching, technical support, office organization, construction, training, various types of outreaches, and many more.
3. To gain exposure so you can encourage others to go, give and pray. If a short termer does not do something with their experience, they have missed the point.
4. To go into areas where it is not possible to live as a career missionary.

Short term missions trips should not be focused on the short termers and what they will gain. They must be centered on God's glory and His purposes. However, if God has sovereign control of the short term missions trip, then lives will be changed for eternity, both the worker and the people they serve.

Today it is fashionable to do extreme sports that stretch a human body to the absolute limit and forcing people to face their worst nightmares and conquer their fears. If the secular world does this for vain glory, why can't believers do it all the more for the sake of the Gospel?

Go into all the world in the authority of Jesus Christ and:

- Climb the mountains
- Cross crocodile-infested rivers
- Do relief work in a disaster zone
- Drive in Manila
- Care for AIDS patients and orphans
- Live where it is dangerous, dirty and disease-ridden
- Bring the Gospel where you'd be afraid to go without God

Let's be extreme for Jesus. Let our FEAR FACTOR be the fear of the Lord that compels us to victorious obedience. Let's say "**Yes, Lord! Here am I. Send me**" to a life-time of obedient service.

* *Operation World, 21st Century Edition* by Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, published by Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001. This book is a unique and valuable tool for anyone who wants to know what is happening in the world spiritually and how to pray specifically for each country. It is available at Christian bookstores or www.operationworld.org

--
Mary Ann Anderson, ACTION Philippines
PO Box 14220, Ortigas Center
1605 Pasig City, Philippines
Email address: mryanmnl@i-manila.com.ph
ACTION Website: www.actionintl.org

Action International Ministries
Canada: PO Box 280, Three Hills AB T0M 2A0
New Zealand: PO Box 5263, Christchurch
United Kingdom: PO Box 144, Wallasey, Wirral CH445WE
United States: PO Box 398, Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043-0398