



# Notes from a commuting missionary

**5** a.m. Groggily I awake. Oh, no... another early morning low-cost flight. But hey, this means direct first hand-involvement in ministry on the 'field' can continue. OK, it's great then! A few hours' flight and here I am, back 'home' in Italy!

Once there, on the way, I catch up with news. Lots of pastoral issues: the missionary struggling financially, difficulties with the church, tensions between missionaries, personal issues, general fatigue, marriage issues, questions relating to strategic development and direction...

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Then straight into a crucial session between the local church leadership and the new, incoming pastor-teacher. How can both sides be helped to process through issues now, so that later things might run more smoothly, more clearly? Lots of questions to ask, seeking to tease out where they sense things should be going, how they intend to operate, what their mutual expectations are... This is really useful and lots of 'sticky' issues are discussed and thought through. Maybe this will help reverse some of the awful Italian-mission statistics, with up to 90% of missionaries 'lasting' no more than one term!

On now to one of the many 'live' committee meetings. Yippee! Really. Part of our time is spent building each other up. This is not just a committee. It's family, it's friends, it's fellowship. Lots of 'business' to look at. Lots of events to organize, budgets to twiddle with, and giant steps of faith to be taken ('is it sensible to plan on a shortfall, but by His grace, of several thousand euro?'). But above all it's moving forward in building up those involved in ministry.

It's far more than managing a structured organization. Here we're thinking of people we know and love. The anguish of the missionary who is seeing his family break-up. What to do? How to support and counsel? The young couple asking for prayer and counsel as to the next 'move' in ministry. The exhaustion faced by many in ministry. Sabbatical? Break? Holiday? What are they? Accountability issues: who to? How should it occur?

How reassuring to know that we come together not to advance an organization, but to respond to the greater kingdom-opportunities lying there before us.

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Sunday, time to share in a church. A challenge to lift up our eyes and look to the immediacy and immensity of the harvest. A global perspective. Enriching to be able to share something of the UK mission challenge, to identify trans-cultural needs which need to be faced with cultural and contextual relevancy and to remind hearers that *'tutto il mondo è paese'* (the world over is the same). The need to live holy lives in the midst of proverbial Italian corruption. Being missional in a pagan context. Living faith out with passion and consistency...

Later on, more to think, talk and pray about. Strategic developing projects: the new centre for alcoholics, the urban and regional evangelism in and around Milan, new ground-breaking initiatives in youth-work...

Back home. Still involved. Today, three lessons. On-line, live, webcam enabled leadership-training. Great sessions. Some heavy theology comes out: what about free-will? Does God change His plans based on man's actions? Should women be involved in church leadership? And then the questions: how should I help other team members be more committed? What about counselling and handling someone with obsessive disorders? This is quality time spent one-to-one, face to face, though separated by thousands of miles! What an opportunity, that of being able to invest in shaping leadership in the Italian church!

And then there are the emails. Pointed questions regarding developing ministries and projects, new avenues of opportunity and partnership to explore. Phone calls to be made: hours spent listening to and dealing with personal situations, family conflicts, ministry-related problems...

And the online committee meetings. Sometimes transcontinental in participation. At times facing a situation which requires attention, assessing progress made, evaluating how to move forward with existing opportunities. At other times we focus for several hours on the details of a conference to be organized – content, logistics, follow-up...

A glimpse into the life of a commuter missionary...

This summer, as you consider Italy, one of many tourist destinations, remember to pray for the Gospel opportunities. Pray for churches and teams reaching out during months of opportunity. Consider how best YOU could be involved in Italy. Why not plan a trip during the next 12 months to be encouraged and to encourage, to connect with ongoing ministry. To take part, to be a commuting-missionary...

**Jonathan Gilmore**

