

An International Bazaar: Around the World in 80+ minutes

Set-up:

Take a large fellowship hall and set tables around all the sides. Each missionary rep or mission trip team has a separate 8' table and is asked to bring bright colored coverings, touchable artifacts, a display, literature, and ethnic music (church provides a tape recorder/CD player for each table.) Over the tables, attached to the ceiling, hang large pieces of fabric to look like awnings. From the ceiling hang many pieces of "native" fabrics and clothing from around the world. In the center of the room place a number of tables in a square for the food court.

Supply each table with a basket of small slips of bright paper of specific prayer requests for the missionary at that table. Set aside a prayer room off the main room and encourage families or small groups to take requests and at some point pray together. Each table needs a CD player; ask the missionary to provide ethnic music -- all the tables blaring at once. (You can even use church people who have been somewhere overseas if you are short on missionaries.)

Food:

Food is provided by members of the church – each family bringing a dish to put on the table. Finger food is best. Encourage a great variety of ethnic choices and large quantities. Little cups, toothpicks, and small spoons encourage people to take small portions of many different things. Cut all samples into small pieces. Have chairs set up around the room where people can sit for a few minutes to eat something – maybe even some very small tables. (Bistro tables would be neat!)

Program:

There are several ways to start.

1. Simply set a time frame – about three hours – and have people arrive and leave as they choose.
2. Set a specific time and have people gather in the main auditorium briefly for instructions and then head for the bazaar.

Provide nametags for all attendees so the missionaries can call them by name.

Make a "passport" for each person -- just a folded little booklet with names of the missionaries and places listed. Make sure each table has some sort of stamp so children, especially, can get their passport stamped for visiting that table.

Have one entrance to the room, perhaps decorated like the entry to a Middle Eastern courtyard -- rugs hanging on the walls, palms, big pots and baskets.

Once people enter the room they graze the food (again and again) and talk to the missionaries at the tables. There is a continuous stream of people walking by each table. Since they have name tags, it is easy to call them by name and talk.

Missionaries should be especially encouraged to engage the children in conversation and have "hands-on" articles on the table to touch and feel.

Some people will have specific questions to ask, but many will just want to chat about what the missionary does, or what they themselves do. It needs to be very laid back and give both missionaries and church people a chance to get to know each other in an informal setting.

The night can run 2-3 hours. The goal is to keep the room was quite crowded so that the "feel" of "this is an event" pervades. Some may come in late or leave early but that was no problem with the relaxed schedule. The busyness of it was part of the atmosphere.

WRAP-UP

At the end of the evening all families could gather in the auditorium for a brief wrap-up. A few games or activities involving the missionaries would be fun -- like a "Where in the world is?" map game and a race or relay using the missionaries. The pastor or missions chair could give a brief wrap-up and then send everyone home.

EXTRA IDEAS

Extra country tables

In addition to missionaries visiting the conference, if there are church families who have lived overseas, they could host a table.

Video

Set aside another room to show videos, and/or visual reports from church mission teams. Post several signs in the main room that explain where the video room is and a time table of what will be shown. The idea is for people to visit that room once or twice during their evening to break up the talk time. Videos should be very short – definitely less than ten minutes.

Indoor playground

It may be good to have another large room set up with play equipment so a parent could take a pre-school child there for a break. That would free up the other parent to do some serious talking if they wanted to see someone. No children should be left unattended by an adult, but some of the mission trip teens could help monitor the room. (School age children should stay with their parents in the bazaar.) Probably there should be an infant nursery.

Email room

Set up a bank of laptops in another room. Get some computer geeks to establish a temporary email address just for the conference and put it on all the machines. Encourage people come in, sit down and write a brief email message to a missionary. (Geeks will also have to have a list of email addresses for all missionaries of the church) All messages would be sent out at the end of the

evening and any answers posted on a bulletin board or web site, if appropriate, later in the week.

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