

What Harm Could Come From Purchasing Just One Airline Ticket?

My friend Emmanuel,* a local Haitian Christian leader, had held two conferences at a local Haitian church. On both occasions, Pastor Evens* readily covered the costs for Emmanuel's travel, food, and service. It made complete sense to Pastor Emmanuel that a local Haitian church should use their own resources to cover expenses for services offered by one of their own.

In the mix of these healthy Haitian relationships and local ministries, a Canadian Christian organization invited Emmanuel to come to Canada for a one-week international mission conference. They offered to pay his flight, ground transportation, and the conference expenses. Emmanuel agreed to honor the invitation. Emmanuel borrowed money from others in Haiti to pay for incidentals and food outside of the conference.

Eventually, Emmanuel returned from the conference and all seemed well—that is until he was ready to serve in pastor Evens' church again. Listen in on the conversation between Evens and Emmanuel:

Evangelist Emmanuel: *“Hello, Pastor Evens! I am about to board a bus to come to your church. I will need to be reimbursed for my travel expenses since I have no money on hand at this time.”*

Pastor Evens: *“I don't understand. You just returned from a conference in Canada based on an invitation by a large mission organization. It cost a lot of money for you to go there. How could you not have any money?”*

Ouch! The unintended consequences of injecting seemingly harmless foreign resources surfaced fast and furious. The ironic thing is that Emmanuel was actually in debt from his trip to Canada because he had to borrow money for incidentals.

In conversation, Emmanuel expressed to me that saying “yes” to one subsidized international airline ticket caused his peers to perceive him as an outsider rather than a credible insider. And others now counted him among those who

had a foreign patron and his new link to Western funding should somehow trickle down to them.

Emmanuel now realized he needed to use caution when accepting offers from international Christians, churches and organizations. Unfortunately, he had to learn the hard way.

Western mission and church organizations love to invite church leaders from developing countries to come to their homelands to participate in conferences, fundraising campaigns, special trainings, fellowship and even rest and recreation. They see it as a way to honor their so-called global mission partners with an opportunity to participate in something they hope will be special for everyone. As illustrated by the account of Emmanuel and Evens, there is a thorny side to these invitations and charitable gifts that make it all happen.

Jean Johnson, in her book *Standing On Our Own Feet Workbook*, shares about twelve types of giving that can easily destroy dignity. One of those types of giving is:

Giving that creates division: This form of giving sows jealousy and competition among local churches and people that would not have been there without artificial infection of money and influence from the outside.

I am fairly sure the organization that invited Emmanuel to Canada will never even hear about how their invitation and subsidy made Emmanuel and Evens stumble in disillusionment, nor about other thorny repercussions.

The apostle John wrote, “Anyone who loves a fellow believer is living in the light and does not cause others to stumble.” (1 John 2:10) The most loving action we can give those around the world is to discover ways to allow leaders to be firmly planted in their own nations—making room for them to mobilize local resources, create indigenous ways to meet and train and support one another.

Notes: *Not their real names. Jean Johnson, *Standing On Our Own Feet Workbook* (Xulon Press: Maitland, FL, 2018), 78. 

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