

**NEWS** POSTED ON OCTOBER 21, 2015

## Melanie Baggao Commissioned to Serve in the Middle East



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Melanie Baggao of Placentia, California, was commissioned to serve with American Baptist International Ministries (IM) in the Middle East. Baggao is IM's third global worker to be serving in this part of the world. She departed for her field of service on October 21, 2015.

The commissioning service was held in Baggao's home church, Epic Church in Fullerton, California, on October 4, 2015.

The Rev. Dr. Samuel Chetti, executive minister of the American Baptist Churches (ABC) of Los Angeles, Southwest and Hawaii, reminded the gathering of the African saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." He said, "It takes a region to raise and nurture a global servant. We have other American Baptist global servants

that minister to the Arab World from this region, which tells you that we have a serious investment in the Middle East.”

In partnership with the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development, Baggao, as a student in the Seminary’s Master in Religion program, will focus on language acquisition (Arabic), enculturation, relationship-building, and preparation for future ministry in Arabic-speaking cultures. Baggao, a former middle school teacher, will also volunteer as a teacher at the Seminary, assisting some students studying English.

The Rev. Ray Schooler, IM’s director of development, led the installation of Baggao’s Mission Partnership Team. He stated: “Today, we send Melanie out with confidence that she does not go alone, but with a full network of individuals and congregations who are praying for her, encouraging her, providing for her needs and supporting her financially.”

The commissioning message was provided in three parts with a focus on “arms.” Epic’s lead pastor, the Rev. Kevin Doi, gave a homily entitled “His Arms: God’s Invitation to Mission.” Paralleling Baggao’s call to service with that of Abram (Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1, 5-6), the Rev. Doi told of how one evening when Baggao was on a mission trip in Arizona, she looked up to see the stars filling the night sky and felt God saying, “See, as numerous as the stars are all my children who do not yet know me.” “Then,” said Pastor Doi, “when Melanie, as a young adult, traveled to Egypt, she fell in love with the Arab world and remembering those Arizona stars thought, ‘God is calling me to the Middle East.’”

The second part of the service was called “Our Arms: The Family that Participates.” The Rev. Sandra Dorsainvil, associate executive minister for Mission and Stewardship for the American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts, told Baggao that she was joining “the beautiful tapestry of missional people.” She added: “Arms of welcome will be extended to you as you go to Lebanon, even as the arms from all the churches where you’ve been sharing your call—from Maine to California—send you forth to spread the good news.”

The Rev. Amelia Chua, missions coordinator for the Alliance of Asian American Baptist Churches, spoke via video of the Alliance’s financial support for the next three years. She said, “We send you forth because God has so clearly anointed you. The eastern Mediterranean region is chaotic at this time. Yet in the midst of war and massive dislocation, you have witnessed Syrian and Lebanese lives transformed by the love of God, which is really the only way to peace. It is an honor for us to partner with you.”

The Rev. Walt White, an IM global consultant, was the first of two speakers focusing on the final theme, “Their Arms: Those Who Receive the Gospel.” He observed, “Many of the arms in the Middle East are bleeding and will never again hold those who have been most precious to them. Their arms may be so tired that they cannot lift them up. In Matthew 9:36 it says that when Jesus ministered, he had compassion because the people were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. In our time the refugees that have ended up in Lebanon have certainly been harassed and helpless. They desperately need the love of Christ that you, Melanie, will help provide.”

The Rev. Charles Jones, IM area director for Europe, the Middle East and Liberia, shared words of affirmation. He reminded Baggao: “You do not go alone, but there may be moments when you feel alone. When that happens, know that you have a heavenly host with you and a host of friends and family. Your partnership is not only with your local church, your region, your Mission Partnership Team and even IM, but with God, who has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation as shown in 2 Corinthians 5:18. The God of the universe, who has called you, will provide everything you need for your well-being and faithfulness in your ministry.”

The Ceremony of Commissioning was led by Wendy Bernhard, a current IM board member and former IM missionary who recently retired after 30 years of service. She said to Baggao, “In your service there will be times of joy and great reward, but there will also be times of discouragement and frustration. There will

certainly be times when you feel the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, especially when you feel most inadequate. You are asked to do only that which you are able to do; beyond that, the matter must be left in God's keeping."

The traditional laying on of hands, a time of prayer for the one being commissioned, was led by Epic Church member Sandee Hunt, who prayed, "We ask that you would give Melanie a spirit that is so uniquely of you—that shares uniquely of your love and grace for the people that she comes to love."

Words of encouragement for Baggao may be sent to [melanie.baggao@internationalministries.org](mailto:melanie.baggao@internationalministries.org).

Learn more about Baggao's ministry and see photos and videos on her [profile page](#) on the IM website.

Download a [bulletin insert](#) with her ministry information, prayer requests and more.

*IM welcomes comments on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalMinistries>.*

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