

What Makes for a Good Mission Trip Experience?

Best Practices

Presbyterian World Mission - Equipping for Mission Involvement: ellen.sherby@pcusa.org

Mission trips are journeys in more than one way:

- Physical--from one place to another with new sights, smells, sounds, sensations.
- Emotional--a journey that arouses a full range of emotional responses from fear and pain to joy to discomfort.
- Intellectual--new customs; new understandings; new skills in analyzing and communicating; new ways of seeing the world.
- Spiritual--many faith questions are raised; faith can be deepened and broadened, or not, depending on whether and how the issues are handled.

From the experience of numerous trip leaders, participants, and mission workers, the best mission trips include the components listed below.

1. Good planning before and for during and after the trip.

- Long-term versus short-term goals
- Needs of the host church/community and needs of the mission team
- Logistical and program plans that address the above

2. Good partnering for the trip here and at the destination with:

- Presbytery or other local congregations in the U.S.
- Equipping for Mission Involvement in Presbyterian World Mission
- PC(USA) partner churches and institutions, including mission co-workers who can serve as liaisons and hosts for mission trip groups
- Mutuality in relationships. Partnership as the way Presbyterians “do mission.”

3. Good leader selection and preparation.

- Shared leadership with complementary knowledge and skills
- Spiritual reflection and prayer for their journey of leadership

4. Good participant selection, orientation, and preparation

- Team building; covenant; conflict resolution discussions
- Cross-cultural sensitivity and communication knowledge & skills
- Biblical reflection and prayer together
- Social analysis skills
- Sustainable development knowledge
- Knowledge of country and culture; PC(USA) partnerships in the country
- Specialized skills needed for service projects

5. Good leadership in processing the experience during the trip.

- Worship/devotions integrated into the schedule
- Debriefing and reflection time integrated into the schedule
- Leadership preparation for using these times well.

6. Good follow-up of participants.

- Group reflection and processing time after the trip, including evaluation.
- Fellowship and fun together.
- Preparing to share the story.
- Mentoring participants as they discern God's call to them in new ways.

7. Good sharing of the experience with others and inviting their deeper commitment to God's mission:

- Congregation
- Presbytery
- Local groups
- Presbyterian Mission Agency ministries and programs

Presbyterian Mission Agency resources:

- *When God's People Travel Together*, a three-volume set for mission trip leaders:
- Debby Vial, *Trip Leader's Planning Manual* (Volume I)
- Barbara Battin, *Acting and Reflecting on Mission Trip Experiences* (Volume II)
- Alice Winters, *Bible Studies for Mission* (Volume III)

Each volume available for free online at pcusa.org/missiontrips under "tools for trip leaders"

Three volume book set for sale at store.pcusa.org. \$20. PDS # 2435807014.

- Stephen Knisely, *Faith in Action: Understanding Development Ministries from a Christian Perspective*, available for free online at pcusa.org/missiontrips
- Gabrielle Beasley, *Interactive Sessions for Faith in Action: Understanding Development Ministries from a Christian Perspective*, available for free online at pcusa.org/missiontrips.

Other resources:

- Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions*, 2014, Moody Publishers.
- Eric H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: a Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*, 1993, Chalice Press.
- David A. Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*, 2006, Baker Books.