



To go or not to go:

How (or whether) to do a summer mission or service trip during the pandemic

Your church has always participated in a summer mission or service trip. Will it be possible this year? Here are a few guiding questions about summer trips and some alternatives to consider.

As church leaders, reflect on the following questions:

1. Why do we go?

- Think about the purpose of the trip. Is it aimed at serving others or for personal and group transformation?
- If it is for transformation, is there another way to accomplish that goal, either in person or virtually?
- If it is about being in service to others, there are other questions to consider. See questions 2, 3 and 4.

2. Is it safe for us to go?

- Is it safe to travel to the place of service? If so, will it be feasible for your church to transport people there with a model of social distancing?
- If the trip will be overnight, will the accommodations allow for social distancing among trip participants?
- Will food be prepared by the team or by someone else? How will meals be served?
- Are there facilities available for good hand-washing protocol and other means for self-care?

3. Is it feasible for us to go?

- Think about the location where you have planned to go: Is it likely or unlikely that the state will shut down or the service site will abruptly change plans?
- Develop contingency plans for a possible shutdown.

4. Does the host community wish to receive a mission team? Is it safe for them to receive a team?

- Consider the fact that even if your team is ready and believes they are not at risk by traveling, they may unwittingly put the host community or service site at greater risk simply by going there.
- Even if your church feels like they can make it work, is the host community ready to receive you?
- Bottom line: Be open to the service site telling you that this is not a good time for your group to visit.

Mission Toolkit: Short-Term Mission





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5. What alternatives are there?

As long as there is a safe way to get to a site and a safe way to be there, there are always places that need help. Some ideas:

- Consider taking day trips for service rather than spending the night.
- Food banks and church food pantries really need volunteers. If the volunteers are healthy, masked and using good hand-washing protocol, more volunteers would be welcome. Check with your presbytery or a neighboring one to learn which community or church food banks might need volunteers.
- Visit bit.ly/OGHSmap to see possible worksites related to hunger and disaster relief. On the map, in the left navigation pane, select “PDA Volunteer Opportunities and Wayside Congregations” and “PHP U.S. Grants and Engagement Opportunities.” Deselect the other options and zoom in on the map to find a volunteer site near you. The contact information will pop up on the left side of the page.
- Explore pcusa.org/hac for a map of Hunger Action Congregations that are doing direct food service and may need volunteers.
- The Office of Christian Formation has created resources for youth leaders seeking alternatives to trips.
 - *Keeping Youth Engaged in Mission during COVID-19:*
presbyterianmission.org/resource/keeping-youth-engaged-in-mission-during-covid-19/
 - *Sheltering at Home is a Time for Advocacy:*
presbyterianmission.org/resource/sheltering-at-home-is-a-time-for-advocacy/

Need further resources for mission trip planning or help discerning how to respond to these questions?

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