

Ideas for Action and Involvement: Answers to the “What Can I Do?” Question

■ The To-Do List

Though some listeners tune out after thirty seconds, there are many others who will respond to your story or presentation with the question, “What can we do?” Be prepared with suggestions. It is a good idea to have handy a short list of “things to do.” This To-Do list may range in involvement from short term, to intermediate, to long term. The list can include options for both prayer action and political action as appropriate, as well as opportunities for a monetary response if that is possible and appropriate. Encourage the listeners to go on a trip themselves by including information on how to find out about trips and how to apply for them, and on how to organize a work trip.

■ Staying Involved

Interpreting the trip is one form of action. Telling the story is a beginning. Beyond interpretation, there is the question: What can I do as a witness to death and resurrection as it has been shown me through this trip? Remembering that this has been a journey inward and a journey outward, here are a few suggestions for your consideration.

PRAYER. You may want to read Walter Wink’s book *Engaging the Powers*. He presents a helpful way of understanding prayer as a political power tool, opening possibilities where God may act through opening ourselves to the power of love. He says that when we pray “we are engaged in an act of co-creation, in which one little sector of the universe rises up and becomes translucent, incandescent, a vibratory center of power that radiates the power of the universe. . . . History belongs to the intercessors who believe the future into being. If this is so, then intercession, far from being an escape from action, is a means of focusing for action and of creation action.”¹

Why would prayer be important to a witness such as yourself?

What new insights or feelings do you have about prayer since your trip?

1. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), pp. 303–304.

PERSONAL LIFESTYLE EVALUATION AND CHANGE. Assess your life in light of what you have seen and experienced. What insights are you bringing home with you? Perhaps you are thinking about making personal changes. What might those changes be? Thinking of the power of language, maybe you are changing the way you talk about the world and the people in it. Perhaps you are choosing to live on less (living more simply so others may simply live). If you wanted to change, how could you sustain a change if it put you at odds with society?

MAKE LOCAL-GLOBAL CONNECTIONS. It may take some work to sift through the mass of information you have obtained (some of it may even be conflicting information) and to boil down the emotional content to discover and distill the specific issues of the trip (for example, misuse of power, habitual hatreds, war). When the issues become clear, challenge yourself to commit to addressing these same issues in your own life and context. It may not be possible to make a difference in the politics of Guatemala (for example) after one trip and from our vantage point back in the United States, but it is possible to address the same issues in our own backyard that we find in Guatemala. Why is it important to address the issues in our own backyard?

MONETARY AND TIME COMMITMENTS. One way for you to continue a relationship with the people and place you visited is by setting aside a portion of your stewardship money to send to relieve suffering, rebuild houses, restore communication and trust. Pledging a certain amount of time, dedicating an hour a week to keeping current with the situation, or writing a letter to someone you met on the trip are other ways to continue the connection. (See Handout 9, "Responsible Giving.")

PARTNERSHIP AND NETWORKS. When participants return from a trip, some are eager to ask their congregation or presbytery to establish a partnership relationship through the channels of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This may mean taking others to see what you have seen, or it may mean inviting people from another country to come to this country, for example through the Mission to the U.S.A. program. Another form of partnership is to establish a prayer covenant and a study covenant in relationship to a country, a presbytery, or a church.

For some countries or regions, "networks" have been established through Worldwide Mission in Partnership Program of the PC(USA). These networks of individuals, congregations, presbyteries, and/or synods have a particular interest in, and commitment to, a given country. They stay informed about developments, share information with one another, advocate on behalf of certain issues, and meet together every two to four years for face-to-face conversation. If you want to know if such a network exists for the country of interest to you,

contact the Worldwide Mission in Partnership Program. For more information on either partnerships or Mission to the U.S.A., contact 888-728-7228, ext. 5024.

ADVOCACY. Having been moved and changed, even transformed, in your understanding of a situation in a particular part of the world, you may want to advocate for that area or group of people. This may be an advocacy within the realm of the church, such as asking their session to write and adopt a resolution concerning the gospel of peace, justice, and joy in relation to child labor in Honduras or El Salvador or the Philippines. This may go further to a whole presbytery or further to the General Assembly. Advocacy may also be in the secular realm: writing letters to congresspersons, asking them to pass legislation prohibiting import of clothes made with child labor. It mean that you seek out organizations already doing this kind of work and work with them. In our denomination, participants may want to contact the Presbyterian United Nations Office at 212-697-4568 or the Washington Office at 202-543-1126.

Of course, these options for engagement and involvement are open to all who hear the stories you have to tell. Which of these have you included on your To-Do list?