

Preparing the Group



■ Preparing Yourself for Orientation

After you have agreed to lead a trip, your preparations will begin. We hope that there will be at least two leaders: one for planning and handling the logistics and one for planning and facilitating the worship and reflection time. Your preparation for worship and reflection will include the following:

- personal learning and reflection on the situation you will enter
- spiritual preparation for leading others into that situation

Both are important. You will soon lead others in what may be one of the most significant and life-changing experiences of their lives. For your own comfort and confidence, as well as for the good of the participants, you must be prepared, physically, intellectually, spiritually. As you

prepare, consider what is appropriate to share with participants to assist them in their preparations.

How you relate to participants on the phone, through letters, and in person will color the group's total experience. Each piece of material you send, each question you answer, each suggestion you make is part of orientation. Before you begin these interactions, it may be helpful to think through the orientation process. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are the primary messages we want to communicate?
- What is the tone we want to set?
- What is the most important thing for participants to learn before the trip?
- What is important to save for experiencing and learning during the trip itself?
- What information will help participants prepare adequately for

the experience and feel confident about being able to engage the moment of travel when it arrives?

■ Developing Participant “Aptitudes”

There are other important preparations (you may call them “aptitudes” or “attitudes”) that help us be open to the experience of transformation:

- the willingness to be teachable
- practicing dialogue as a primary form of interaction
- practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, community, nonviolent speech, life review, benevolent glancing, reading the morning paper with a prayer, journal writing

In Resources for Orientation and Preparation you will find a handout for you and the participants. It is entitled “Developing Aptitudes for Mission Participation” (Handout 1, page 89). It offers specific suggestions for making attitudinal preparations. You may duplicate Handout 1 and send it to participants in pre-trip mailings or use it in orientation sessions prior to the trip.

■ Orientation

Orientation is more than just disseminating useful information. It is also your first opportunity for community building. While the information is important, equally important is the meeting and the getting-to-know-you time the group will spend together. This time is especially helpful to the leader for identifying potential problems

as well as gifts that can be called forth and counted on during the trip.

Orientation suggestions are included in the “Before” chapter because some of you will be leading local groups from one congregation or presbytery and will be able to gather the group before travel. If you are a leader of a group that will be meeting for the first time at departure (such as a synod or national trip), do not skip this section! You may adapt activities for an “on-site” orientation as a group gathers at the time of the trip. Orientation activities and handouts are located in Resources for Orientation and Preparation, pages 74–108.

■ Worship

If your orientation is a day or longer, you may want to schedule more than one time of worship. You might come together in worship early in a two-day event or at the beginning of a daylong event, as well as at the close of the event. If you are using a short time in the early part of a trip as orientation, you may want to have worship at the close of the time. Whether it is an extended orientation prior to the trip, or a short orientation at the beginning of the trip, worship is an important way to affirm the community that is being formed and to ground the community and the trip in the Word and worship of God.

If you know the participants ahead of time, you may want to invite some of them to assist you in planning and celebrating the

group's first worship experience. If you don't know participants, you may discover some people in the course of the orientation who would be willing to participate in the leadership of the worship experience. In this case, it is good to have short Scripture readings printed out for people to read, or to ask people to read brief portions of the liturgy that you highlight for them on whatever worship sheet you prepare. You may want to include as an integral part of the first worship experience an affirmation of the group and its becoming a community. A sample for a group covenanting service may be found in *Resources for Worship*. Other worship resources may be found in *Tales of the Heart: Affective Approaches to Global Education*, by Tom Hampson and Loretta Whalen.⁴ You may also consider providing a commissioning service for participants to use in their home congregations. See *Resources for Worship* for a sample.

■ Planning Ahead for Worship and/or Bible Study

Planning ahead for worship during the trip is essential. While on the trip you want to be able to live fully into the experience instead of frantically trying to figure out what you will do for worship that evening. Plan with an eye toward flexibility. For example, you might write some prayers ahead of time, but don't stubbornly stick to them. You will want to pray specifically for the people you meet and the projects you see and to incorporate their concerns into your prayers.

For most groups, music is an important element. Determine how you will provide music. You might invite people to tell you their favorite hymns. If you will be copying hymns, write the publishers for permission. Be open to new hymns the group may learn on the trip. If you do not have musical skills yourself, see if there is someone else on the trip whom you could ask to be "music director" for the group.

It may be helpful to take along a candle or other object that can serve as a consistent focus for worship during the trip. Using this object during the trip is one way of bringing forward the group's beginnings, during orientation, into the trip itself. The worship focus may be added to as participants discover objects that represent important aspects of the group's experience. Having one piece that remains

4. Tom Hampson and Loretta Whalen, *Tales of the Heart: Affective Approaches to Global Education* (New York: Friendship Press, 1991).

constant, however, helps to provide continuity in worship. Continuity may be especially important if you are in a place in which worship differs significantly from what participants are used to at home. (For instance, if you are guests in a Russian Orthodox service on a Sunday, having a familiar daily worship center to return to may be welcome.) On the other hand, you and the traveling community may want to incorporate into your daily worship pieces of the liturgy, such as a hymn, a prayer, a phrase or response, or some part of the tradition from the place you visit.



If you plan to celebrate Communion at some time on the trip, perhaps as part of the closing worship service, you must obtain permission, prior to the trip, from a session or governing body. A sample permission form is in the Resources for Worship section.

■ Meeting and Greeting: The Importance of Introductions

The Bible is full of the importance of names and naming. Naming the animals is one of the privileges God gave Adam in the second creation story. To the ancient Hebrews, the name of God (Yahweh) was so sacred and powerful that it was never pronounced;

rather, YHWH was substituted for the full word naming God. When something really important happened to a biblical person, it was often accompanied by a name change. For instance, Abram and Sarai became Abraham and Sarah, Jacob became Israel, Simon became Peter, Saul became Paul. Names are a gift that invites persons into relationship.

Suggestions for getting acquainted by name ("Basic Introductory Exercises") appear in Resources for Orientation and Preparation. These may be used in orientation sessions prior to the trip or as the group comes together at the time of

the trip. The intent of each of these "games" is to use names as many times as possible so that people are able to put names and faces together and so they can begin to connect. Participants may be drawn into further conversations when, for example, two people discover that they both lived in Jasper, Georgia, or attended the same college ten years apart, or are avid fans of Star Trek, or love jazz. Such pieces of information may become building blocks for deepening community ties, especially on trips that include a lot of time traveling in a van from place to place or on a service trip when no work is done in the evening.

It is important to know people's names and to get those names right. This holds true for trip participants and for people the group meets along the way. Find out if a nickname is preferred. When meeting people on the trip ask for the spellings of their names, especially unfamiliar ones. Introduce EVERYONE, not just the "important person" in the foreground! It may sometimes be appropriate for the trip participants to introduce themselves to the people with whom you meet, giving some detail about themselves like where they live in the United States or what their primary work is. Even such minimal sharing allows people to meet on somewhat common ground.

■ Deepening Community

In the introductory games, people have shared names and "fast facts." These are information pieces. To build community, we will need to share more than information. We will need to share emotion, spirit, physical space, intellectual exploration, common experience. Building community is not a one-time event. It is not usually "accomplished" in the first day or even during the first several days of a trip. Also, there is no guaranteed formula for building community. It may happen quickly with one group, never with another. True community is a grace and a gift. There are, however, some things you as a leader can do to facilitate the formation of community.

To Facilitate Community

- First and foremost, give it space and time to happen.
- Second, anticipate it without forcing it.
- Third, encourage it in small ways. Be alert to opportunities to affirm the group's movement toward community.
- Fourth, nurture it when it becomes a reality.

■ Don't Squelch Community

There are some things a leader may do, with or without knowing it, to squelch community. Being aware of things that may squelch community helps you avoid minimizing or missing the gift of community.

One way to squelch community is to avoid opportunities for sharing meaningful conversation. To only "gather facts" and not share reflection and responses to those facts may make it possible for the group to avoid an encounter of depth with one another.

A second way to squelch community is to avoid conflict. Because we are diverse human beings with different backgrounds, styles, preferences, ideas, opinions, ways of learning and relating, when two or more people get together for a significant length of time, the possibility for conflict exists. Sometimes even "just the facts" can produce some conflict. As in a marriage or friendship, conflict does not need to be a

“dirty word.” In fact, one of the ways we come to know each other is through conflict. The places we are different are the places we may enrich each other and/or learn to appreciate and enjoy each other beyond the sameness of a group that simply shares a common interest. When this happens, we may become a community in which loving one another includes our differences and acknowledges, even celebrates, our diversity. Especially in a group with significant differences in background, experience, opinion, and perspective, it is important NOT to avoid the places of difference and potential conflict, but rather to use them as creative openings for building community.

You may want to copy and distribute the General Assembly’s document “Seeking to Be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement” (Handout 3 in Resources for Orientation and Preparation). While this document was prepared for congregations in the midst of conflict, it contains guidance for group interaction in all conversations. Distributing these guidelines ahead of time, or on the first day of the trip, will not only offer participants some general ground rules for group interaction but will also prepare them for conversation that may reveal differences and/or disagreements.



■ Preparing Participants for the Journey Inward/ Journey Outward: A Way of Looking at Mission and Peacemaking

When God’s voice is heard, the body knows it from its core, from the inside out rather than the outside in. . . . The Living God speaks to each of us from the inside out, in our own voice. For my soul to recognize God’s voice there must be an inner voice I hear, an imperative from the depths of my soul. The word “commandment” casts God’s voice as if it were only a voice of external authority, but our own teachers know that when we truly hear, we hear with an inner voice and touch an inner knowing as well. Or perhaps we should say

that when we hear God’s voice, outside and inside merge to become the same place. The voice of God addresses us from within and from without at the same time!

This is the authentic voice that speaks to us in crystalline moments of our lives. I would like to challenge us to dive deeply enough into life, into [Scripture], and into

committed spiritual practice to encounter not merely authority but authenticity. We will know we are compelled to sacred action when we have learned to hear the

“voice that is both within and without” simultaneously as God’s voice and our own. Then we will respond to the call to live sacred lives because this call resonates with our very being.⁵

Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21 KJV; NRSV note). For people living under Roman rule, experiencing cultural oppression, political disenfranchisement, and economic exploitation, it was not surprising that a Zealot like Judas Iscariot fervently sought an outer solution for his community’s predicament. Jesus did not deny the outer reality of Roman rule; in the Sermon on the Mount he offered a truly creative nonviolent suggestion for how to deal with the situation. But Jesus also spoke the difficult truth that the potential for authentic humanity is within us and among us: The New Community of God—the New Reality of God’s peace built of justice and joy—is within.

If we understand the work of mission and peacemaking as work for the “kingdom of God,” the New Reality of Wholeness in which all people participate, then the work is both outer work, to transform systems we can see “out there,” and also inner work, to address the destructive patterns of those systems that we have ourselves internalized.

We internalize through simply living in our culture, being immersed in a particular world view, participating in the educational system, social systems, arts, media, and so on. Whether from the perspective of one who experiences the oppression of the outer system of domination and dehumanization, or from one who benefits by it, we come to take into ourselves the assumptions and attitudes of the system. This can be very confusing. For example, a European American man may have come to understand the issues of racism and sexism, yet he continues to demonstrate traces of racism and sexism in his lifestyle and relationships. An African American woman may have worked her way into a successful job in the corporate world of marketing, yet she continues to suffer from both racism and sexism because it lingers in her own self-image. Someone who grew up in a situation of economic poverty and moved into a middle-class lifestyle may still feel the pain and pinch of poverty and act out of that reality rather than from her or his current experience.

Elie Wiesel says: “To simply be human in our time is a creative act.”⁶ To simply seek the authentic humanity modeled by Jesus is a creative act. Jesus was rooted in God. He embodied the Divine in word and deed. That he did so in the fullness of human life with all its intricate web of problems, issues, and challenges that

5. Marcia Prager, *The Path of Blessing: Experiencing the Energy and Abundance of the Divine* (New York: Bell Tower, 1998), pp. 156–157.

6. As quoted in Anne Broyles, ed., *Ways of Justice, Ways of Prayer* (Washington, DC: Methodist Federation for Social Action, 1993).

remain unsolved was a creative act. As participants make the outer journey of the trip, they have the potential of being involved in the creative act of “becoming authentically human” as Jesus was authentically human. The dialogue between the outer experience and the inner experience, both historical and current, will be an important part of the total journey.

■ Risks in Not Addressing the Inner Journey

Whether it is conscious or unconscious, the journey will be both inward and outward. If it happens unconsciously, there are some risks. First, without realizing it, a participant may exhibit behaviors arising from issues related to her inner journey that are not part of God’s new creation. This may be especially true when a person is operating in a country, culture, or language foreign to her. Such behaviors are part of that residue of systemic injustice, deeply patterned into one’s personality through many years of “unconsciousness.” Even persons with excellent intentions for doing good in the world may be blind to what lies beneath their public presentation of self. A well-intentioned European-American woman may use language that reveals her assumption that the Western world, the North American lifestyle, is superior to that of a culture that has different standards for shaping life. Her words may embarrass her and perhaps the group. Or, in group interactions, a man who has not worked

through issues of sexism may use language offensive to a woman on the trip. Either within the group or as part of the group, unconscious issues of the inner journey toward God’s peace may arise. These may be problems or they may be opportunities to assist persons in taking a step further on the journey. They may be opportunities to explore with the group the inward and outward dimensions of our own experience of the misuse of power, and perhaps understand more fully the issues of the misuse of power in another country, as well as the interactions between the United States and other countries in terms of power dynamics.

A second risk of this new awareness happening unconsciously is that of missing opportunities for growth and new insights. For example, a participant may awaken to a new sense of connection. Perhaps he may be wrestling in silence with a new perception about self and cultural imperialism. If you don’t encourage the group to address the inner journey, the individual may not mention the new-found perception and the wrestling, thus cutting off the possibility for enriching the group and stretching others’ experiences. Likewise, the silence cuts off community support and encouragement for the individual as he explores more deeply the new awareness.

If potential awakening is named as part of the whole experience of the trip—that is, if the group understands the dynamics of the

inner/outer journey they are making—there is a potential for self-reflection and group support on both aspects of the journey. It has been said that the personal is political. If we are willing to encounter the personal dimensions of the political realm in which we have been raised, if we are willing to examine the dynamics of its ripple effect in the rest of the world, then we may be more willing to look at our own lives as places in need of change. If we are willing to claim the “baggage” with which we travel and examine it along the way, we may find we arrive home with less “baggage” than when we began the trip.

This, too, is mission. This, too, is peacemaking. This is also a necessary element of real transformation. We need to make changes in the outward manifestations of poverty, hunger, war, etc., that are symptoms of domination systems. We also need to make changes in the inner patterns we have learned from those systems to reach the full transformation of self and world that God hopes for us.

If transformation is to be an intentional part of the experience, it is essential that the publicity and initial communications about the trip convey this message. As Christians from the United States, we tend to move into the world with a sense that we are going to “help” and to “give.” There is nothing wrong with that. However, we must recognize how much help we need in confronting the systems of domination in

ourselves, in our own country and in our own world.

■ Planning for a Group Journal

We encourage you to offer the group the experience of a group journal. Purchase a blank journal for this purpose and have it ready the first day (a journal with ruled paper, such as a school notebook, is usually better than a blank one). At the orientation, introduce the group to the concept of the group journal and to the expectation that everyone will take one day of the trip to write about in the journal. If possible, assign the first person immediately so that the journal can begin the first day. Each consecutive day at the briefing or debriefing, pass the journal to



the next person responsible for the writing. If someone has been assigned to a particular day and has not had an opportunity to complete the writing, make arrangements for that person to catch up later on, using the notes from his or her personal journal for that day.

■ Briefing on Trip Destination

Participants need to have basic information about the region, country, or countries you will visit. This information should include a brief history, summaries on the culture, economy, political system, and religious traditions present there. Also include information about any Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partnerships in the area. The Worldwide Mission in Partnership Program can provide information on PC(USA) partnerships and activities for a given destination. See Handout 5, "Resources from the General Assembly" in the section on Resources for Orientation and Preparation, page 107. For destinations within the United States, the local presbytery and synod offices can provide valuable information about Presbyterian ministries in the area.

Guidance on local customs is important as well. For instance, if local custom requires that women not wear shorts or slacks in public, it is essential that you include that information in the briefing material. If the church or denomination which is hosting you does not allow its members to smoke or drink, tell the participants this and ask them to honor those customs. Where other languages are spoken, it is helpful to include some basic language education. You may want to provide a list of common phrases for participants.

■ Sharing Information

Information sharing is an important part of the pre-trip experience. For some people it may even be the MOST important part. For others it will be more important to know the people than the schedule. Either way, information sharing is part of helping people feel at home. It provides a framework for the trip into which people can relax, a skeleton that is fleshed out each day, a structure on which people can lean. While it is practically impossible to provide everyone with all the information they may need in order to feel completely comfortable, sharing as much as is possible is important, always with the proviso that things may change "when we get there."

Whether you construct the schedule yourself or someone else provides the major time frames for the local experience, it is important to include in the schedule some time each day for briefing and debriefing of the day. Regular worship and community reflection time should also be part of the schedule. More will be said about this in the next chapter. It is important during the meetings or in the mailings to let people know that worship and reflection will be part of the trip.

Once you know who will be in the group, ask each person to give you a one-paragraph introduction to themselves. Compile the information so participants will know who is in the group.

Put together a packet with all the briefing information, including the information on group members, and mail it to the participants—or otherwise distribute it—prior to the trip. Take time during the orientation to go over these items with participants and to invite any questions they have about the information. You may want to refer to this material several times during the trip to remind participants of it and to reinforce its importance.

■ Developing Cross-Cultural Skills

■ Building Cross-Cultural Awareness

Whether you are traveling to India or to an American Indian reservation within the geographic boundaries of the United States—any place outside your own home church setting and life location—an awareness of cross-cultural concerns is important. A few small examples: if you live in Maine, Connecticut, or eastern New York and you travel to Ohio, you may elicit laughter if you ask for a “soda.” It’s called “pop” there. If you travel north from South Carolina or Georgia don’t expect to be served sweetened ice tea in Wisconsin. They let you add the sugar yourself. If you are from an African American congregation, or a Korean American congregation, you may find significantly different worship styles in a predominantly European American church

setting. If you travel from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota to suburban Minneapolis, you may find some difference in the way time is perceived and a different perspective on what it means to be “on time.”

In many cultures it is impolite to make direct eye contact. In others the distance at which conversations take place is much closer than in our own. In some cultures and religious traditions, it is considered disrespectful for women to wear clothing which does not cover their arms. It is important for the group to have



information about the cultural customs in the place to which you travel. Encourage participants to honor local customs as much as is possible.

■ Responding to Cultural Differences

Beyond information, it is important for participants to look at their responses to cultural differences. As North Americans, we tend to think our way is the best way. Participants need to learn how to move

beyond their own culture. We need to learn to be genuinely open to another culture, to acknowledge differences as neither good or bad, but simply different. We need to learn to be available to its way and wisdom as an enrichment and, often, a needed instruction or correction to our own culture.

■ Building Multicultural Community

One of our hopes for mission trips is that the diversity among trip participants will increase. The exercise “Perspectives and Perceptions” may be used to point out that even within the group of travelers there is the potential for differing perceptions. These differences may be due to the following or other factors:

- life history
- cultural background
- language
- race or ethnicity
- gender
- age
- theology

■ Different Perspectives

If you are an African American leading a trip to South Africa, your own perspective on the trip experience may differ greatly from that of a European American member on the trip. If you are a Korean participant on a trip to South Korea, your perspective may enrich the group’s understanding of culture and religion in that country. If you are a man on a trip to a country in which women are generally not allowed to participate in the

social life of the culture, you may find it hard to hear how deeply a woman on the trip connects that experience with her own experience of church and society at home. In any of these cases, conflict may occur within the group.

Conflict that arises from conversation in a diverse group may be the most instructive learning encounter of the trip. It may become a learning tool that enriches, rather than detracts from, the group’s total experience. Traveling in a multicultural community that is aware of the issues raised by multicultural encounters, and that is open to speaking directly about those issues, can be an added bonus, because it will offer opportunities to look at the world and at oneself in new and different ways.

■ Power Dynamics

In his book *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in Multicultural Community*,⁷ Eric Law notes that there will be particular challenges to leading a multicultural group. One of the dynamics that will be operating within a multicultural group is that of power. Eric Law identifies two kinds of power in cultures. He describes high power cultures as ones in which persons sense they have the ability to change things and are willing, therefore, to speak out, to act on beliefs, to take healthy risks for change. He describes low power cultures as ones in which the

7. Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Lie Down with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993).

opposite is true. People in these cultures tend to feel there is no possibility for change. They may not speak out, may not value their own opinions, may not risk themselves in order for a change to take place. When people of high power cultures mix with people in low power cultures, their views of personal power are often reflected in the way they relate to one another. Often, men (coming from a high power culture), especially white men of European heritage, tend to speak first. Women of the same race and national origins, may speak second. People of low power cultures, Hispanic persons, African American persons, Southeast Asian persons, and so on, will tend to remain silent, sometimes for the duration of the conversation—if they are not personally invited to speak. If this becomes a pattern in the group, it may isolate those of low power cultures. This phenomenon reduces the richness of the whole group's experience. These same power dynamics are often at work when groups from the United States attempt to talk and work with people in other countries, creating many communication difficulties and, sometimes, hard feelings. To explore this further, see chapter 3 in Law's book, "Differences in the Perception of Power and Their Consequences for Leadership."

A second cultural difference can affect the life of a multicultural group. There are persons who take more time to think before speaking than others do. For them to be called upon and expected to respond immediately is to require an unnatural manner of interaction. Again, the group loses if persons are passed over because their initial silence seems to indicate they do not have anything to say.

Please see Resources for Orientation and Preparation, pages 74–108, for ideas on how to prepare the group for the trip.

■ Further Resources

Friendship Press, the publishing arm of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., contains many country- or region-specific books, videos, and "map'n'facts" in its inventory, as well as materials on specific global issues. Many of the resources are produced by ecumenical working groups. Call 1-800-889-5733 or check online at www.nccusa.org/friend/fphome.html.

For sources of information available from the Worldwide Mission in Partnership Program, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, and from other General Assembly offices or programs, see Handout 5, "Resources from the General Assembly," page 107.