

Short-term Mission Trips: Making the Most of Your Experience

Mission trips are physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual journeys.

- **Physical**—from one place to another with new sights, smells, sounds and sensations.
- **Emotional**—a journey that arouses a full range of emotional responses, from fear and pain to joy to discomfort.
- **Intellectual**—new customs, understandings and skills in analyzing and communicating, and 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.

Based on the experience of numerous trip leaders, participants and mission workers, the best mission trips include:

Thorough planning before, during and after the trip.

- Establish long-term versus short-term goals.
- Weigh the needs of the host church/community with the needs of the mission team.
- Develop logistical and program plans that address the above.

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

- Presbytery or other local congregations in the U.S.;
- Equipping for Mission Involvement office 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.”

Smart leader selection and preparation.

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

Thoughtful participant selection, orientation and preparation that includes:

- Team building and conflict resolution discussions;
- Cross-cultural sensitivity and communication knowledge and skills;
- Biblical reflection and prayer;
- Social analysis skills;
- Sustainable development knowledge;
- Knowledge of country and culture;
- Specialized skills needed for service projects.

Opportunities to process the experience during the trip.

- Worship/devotions integrated into the schedule.
- Debriefing and reflection time integrated into the schedule.

Appropriate follow-up of participants.

- Group reflection and processing time after the trip, including evaluation.
- Offer fellowship and fun activities.
- Storytelling or story-sharing preparation.
- Mentoring participants as they discern God’s call to them in new ways.



Sharing of the experience with others and inviting their deeper commitment to God’s mission by visiting:

- Congregations;
- Presbyteries;
- Local groups;
- Presbyterian Mission Agency ministries and programs.

NOTE:

See **Appendix C** for a tool to help you craft mission stories that inspire involvement.

Mission Toolkit: Taking It Home

Your congregation has been reflecting on where God is calling you to participate in God's mission in the world. Perhaps you've identified an area of focus, have begun talking about the values you bring to mission engagement and discovered some signposts directing you to where God is calling you. So now, what's next?

In the pages that follow, we seek to provide you with some practical tools and resources that your congregation or mission organization can use to evaluate and strengthen your mission involvement. Basic questions for your church or organization to ask as you look toward discernment and seek next steps for collective action in God's mission may include:

Why do we engage in mission?

What scriptural basis do we lift up and lean on to begin to tell the story of why mission is the foundation of the church? What drives and calls our church or mission organization?

What does our mission engagement look like?

How can we have collective impact in God's mission as Presbyterians with mission partners in our church or organization, in our communities, across the U.S. and around the world?

Who is involved in our mission efforts?

Who decides what our mission focus will be? Who are our partners? How do we engage in decision-making about mission direction and engagement with partners in our church, our community and across the world? How will we develop our mission focus with cultural sensitivity, mutual dignity, awareness and partnership?

What cultural divides might we be crossing as we engage in mission?

Who will serve as a link between our church and our partners to help us navigate our mission relationship?

As your church or mission organization reflects on how you form part of God's mission and where God is calling you now or in the future, we encourage you to consider these questions and engage in continuous discernment. An in-depth assessment tool can be found in **Appendix A**, and a template for organizing your mission discernment and evaluation criteria can be found in **Appendix B**. World Mission staff are available to help your congregation evaluate its mission involvement, discern its sense of call and find a clearer focus moving forward.

For more information, contact:

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Discerning Your Mission Focus

Discernment is best done in the context of community, like a congregation, mission committee or small group. In the process of discernment, we seek to sift,

separate or distinguish among various possibilities that are before us, helping us to know the difference between a strong desire and a true sense of call.

The discernment process requires that we think, learn, pray and pay attention to the ways that different paths resonate with who we are in light of God's mission.