



To go or not to go:

Questions for discerning whether or not to lead a short-term mission trip

As church leaders, reflect on the following questions:

1. Why are we going (or why are we sending a team)?

- Is it to have a new, exciting experience or an adventure in a very different context?
- Is it to serve others in need?
- Is it to enter into deeper fellowship with people in the Body of Christ?
- Is there a different way to accomplish our goal? For example, if the goal is team-building, would participating in a camp experience together be just as effective?

Mission is really God’s mission — not our mission, not our church’s mission. If a primary motivation for going is for personal transformation or team-building, consider if other kinds of experiences or trips would better suit that goal.

2. Will the trip offer us the opportunity to learn about root causes of poverty and/or violence?

It is vital to understand the causes of poverty, violence and other kinds of “brokenness” in order to get the “big picture” of why you are visiting a place for mission service and — perhaps — how different political, social and economic forces contribute to the brokenness.

3. How will the host community be involved in our trip experience?

- If it’s a work trip, will we be doing work *for* the community or *with* the community?
- Are we doing work that people in the community could best do themselves?
- Who will decide what work will be done and how it will be accomplished? Our group? A staff person from a local nonprofit? The community itself?
- If it’s a study tour, will there be at least one or two opportunities to reflect and learn together with people from the place we are visiting?

First, we must listen to what mission partners want and need rather than deciding what we think that they need or want. Secondly, whenever possible, the work should be done in partnership with people from the local community. This may not always be possible or desirable, however; many community members will have work to attend to during the mission trip team’s working hours.

Also, how might the people of the place you are visiting be able to worship God with you and to reflect on the experience together with your group?

Mission Toolkit:
Short-Term Mission



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4. Will there be times at the beginning of the trip for comprehensive orientation, including learning about the place and the people we will be visiting?

Reading about the place ahead of time isn't a substitute for on-the-ground learning. It is important to keep an open mind and take time to learn about where you are going before and during the trip.

5. Is there a host or leader in the country or community we will visit who can help us understand cultural differences, in an effort to "first, do no harm"?

Prioritize times to learn from people who are from the place you are visiting before and during the trip. Learn from them about their culture, history and current events.

6. Will we be able to build time into the schedule to have group debriefing, devotional and evaluation times?

Mission trips have a lasting impact when participants think and pray about what they are seeing, experiencing, learning and feeling. It is important to schedule time during the trip for debriefing as a group, time for individual reflection (or downtime) and time for group devotions.

7. Will there be ways to bring the mission trip home, tying experiences and learning back into our church and home community?

Make plans before you depart about how the team will engage with the home church during the trip and upon the team's return to the U.S. Will there be at least one opportunity to share stories and photos about what you experienced on the trip?

After the trip, explore shared service/work opportunities together with local communities closer to home. Would it be possible to partner with those who are different from you in a neighborhood in your hometown? Get in touch with leadership from a neighboring church for coffee or lunch to discuss ideas together.

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

Contact **Ellen Sherby** at **800-728-7228, ext. 5612** or **ellen.sherby@pcusa.org**.