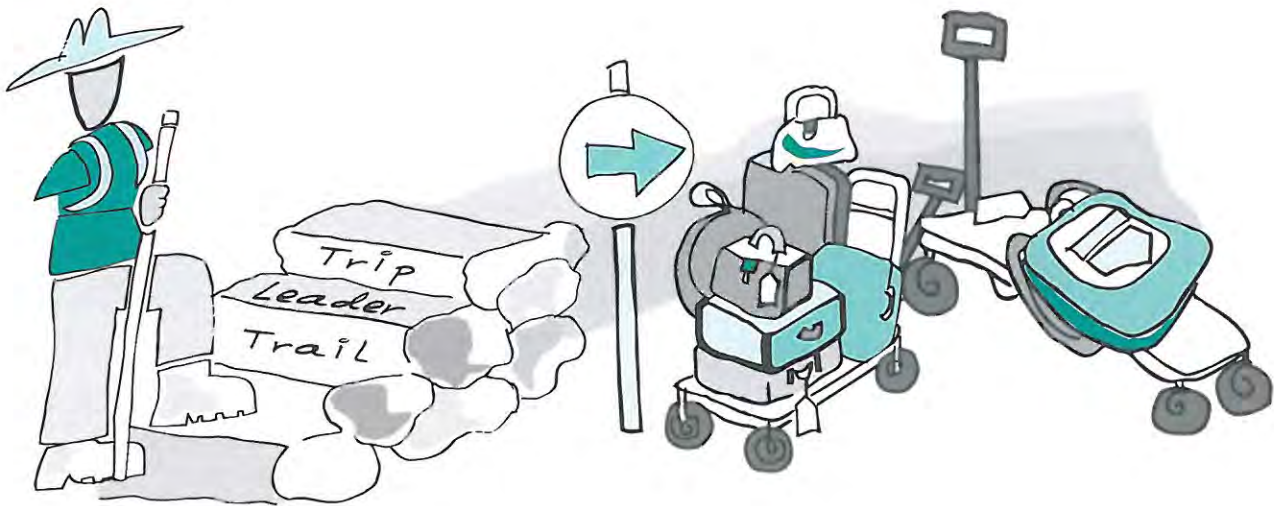


Experiencing the Trip



■ Encountering God

The following biblical reflections invite you to think about your leadership during the trip. But you don't need to keep them to yourself. They are written in such a way that you may share the perspectives they contain with the trip participants.

■ Spiritual Confirmation

Read Matthew 3:13–17.



Matthew 3 tells the story of Jesus' baptism. Whether the trip you are taking is a travel/study seminar or a service-learning project, it has the potential to be a life-changing experience. In this sense, it is like a baptism marking the end of the old life, the beginning of a new life. It is as if the experience itself becomes the Jordan River, a river of God, a river of living water that

washes away old perspectives and invites a reorientation of one's life. Within this experience, it is quite possible that participants may experience, individually or together, a "sacred moment," a moment of sacrament when they are particularly aware of God's presence. It may not be in the form of a descending dove. It may not be a voice from heaven. Instead, it may be while eating handmade tortillas hot off the fire in the cooking hut of a Mayan village. It may be the voice of Abuna Elias Chacour speaking about the high school and college he founded on the West Bank for students who are Palestinian, Israeli, Muslim and Druze. It may be as they worship among the multitude of Presbyterians in Seoul, Korea. It may be the moment after they brush the last bit of paint on the walls of a new hospital kitchen in Pinon, Haiti. The experience of mission trips and travel/study seminars is an "immersion" experience: it is

intense. It is potentially transforming. It holds the possibility of death and resurrection.

■ Reflection Questions

1. Reflect on the story of Jesus' baptism. How did his baptism impact and influence his life? In what ways was Jesus' baptism a part of his whole life journey?
2. Identify and reflect on significant events in your own life (for example, graduations, marriage, new job, birth of children or grandchildren). How have these events been part of the unfolding of your life journey?
3. Think of a time in your life when you were "immersed" in a project or an experience and emerged from it changed in some way. How was your life affected by the event?

In your role as leader of the trip, watch for the life-changing moments. Listening to participants' accounts of such experiences, affirming those moments, celebrating them, and nurturing them is an important part of your calling. With individuals, this may mean listening to their unfolding stories. It may mean standing in silent awe with them after the telling. Such moments often need "a witness," someone who will share the power of the moment with another. Entering the city of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, a trip participant cried when he saw the destruction there. In that moment, the appropriate response became

a silent extension of a hand, a connection, a recognition, a validation of his holy response to the aftermath of violence in that place. With a group, there may be an opportunity to honor in ritual, in liturgy, in worship together either the corporate experience of a sacred moment shared by all or the collection of individual experiences present in the group. It may be helpful for you to talk about such experiences with the whole group during the orientation time or in one of the early reflection sessions and encourage the group to be sensitive to such moments, so that participants may be "witnesses" for each other.

■ Confronting Systems

Read Luke 6:1–36.



In Luke's sixth chapter, we find a sequence of events: Jesus' confrontation with unjust systems, Jesus calling his disciples, and Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Plain. In the places you will visit, it is probable that some form of injustice exists or you would not be there. Poverty, hunger, political oppression, economic inequities, religious prejudice, war. You may know a great deal about the problems of the people you visit. Or, you may know very little. You may find that the information you have is insufficient, inaccurate, challenged by what you see or hear. What you see and hear may also be in conflict. Your encounter with injustice, with

the victims of it, with the systems that perpetrate it, with people who perpetuate it, may be very uncomfortable.

As you prepare to share the experience of travel, work, and study with others, it is important to consider ahead of time how you will respond to various aspects of the situation. How will you respond to those whom we label “victims”? How will you deal with confrontation with the systems that wound and kill? How will you deal with the people who represent those systems? How will you deal with the inner turmoil all this may cause? How will you deal with whatever responsibility or complicity we North Americans may bear in the situation? How will you deal with your own pain in response to the situation, especially if in your own experience you have been excluded in the United States, in our culture, or in the church because of your race, gender, age, ethnic heritage, or any other difference?

When we come face to face with injustice, when we understand peace with justice as the fulfillment of God’s intention for creation, and when we deeply desire God’s intention, then we seek ways of contributing to its realization. We want to make a commitment, a commitment that reaffirms our intent to be people of God, disciples of Jesus Christ, living temples of the Holy Spirit. Our commitment or recommitment opens the opportunity for God to call us again. As you travel, listen, work, and learn, be alert to conversion experiences that may lead you or any of the

participants to commit or recommit your lives to God. Some may experience a new conversion through their immersion in another culture, some through a gift of time and labor, still others in situations of great pain or great promise. Nurture the recognition of conversion moments, and celebrate the possibilities.

■ *Reflection Questions*

1. Reflect on the story of Jesus violating the laws of the Sabbath in order to care for people’s basic needs and to restore health. Identify places in your life or in the life of the church where there are difficult decisions to make about ethical priorities and compassionate action. In what ways do the situations you have named relate to the Bible passage?
2. Think of a time when you felt moved to a small act of compassion, even though it was risky, because you were going against a law or cultural value or popular understanding (for instance, stopping to help someone when it meant being late for church).
3. Remember a time when you felt called by God to make a commitment or to renew a commitment. What were the circumstances of that calling and how did you respond to the call?

We read that after he called the disciples, Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Plain. This capsule version of Jesus’ teaching reminds us that, as disciples, we have not “arrived,” but rather we have “begun.” The need for daily opportunities for reflection and

conversation, for clarification of information and questioning, for mulling and musing, for pondering and praying cannot be understated. If people give themselves over to immersion and conversion they need the support of a community, a community that continues to learn and reflect, to support and challenge. As you move through the time of learning and/or serving, create spaces in the schedule, make time for participants to “reconnect” with each other and with “the mystery of their being” through reflection and community.

■ Spirited Comprehension

Acts 2:1–21

Acts 2 is the story of Pentecost. It takes place in Jerusalem, which at that time was a cross-cultural meeting place. People from many places came to trade in the markets there. It was not unusual to hear several different languages spoken. What was so astounding in this Pentecost event is that people understood each other. The Tower of Babel story (Gen. 11:1–9) was reversed. Communication was restored, made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit. For a brief moment, communication opened up across nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, native languages, cultural experiences, and social stratifications. Wherever communication is restored, we hear an echo of Pentecost. Whenever communication is restored, we receive a gift of new possibility.

Imagine your whole trip as having the potential for a kind of Pentecost, for an understanding beyond differences, for a restoration of communication, for a coming together of community. This may not even be an international event. This Pentecost experience may happen within your own group. Even the most seemingly homogeneous groups may discover differences that need to be understood, gaps in communication that must be bridged, separations between people that need to be reconciled. If your group is one of diverse people, there will be a clear opportunity for a Pentecost quality to the trip. People of differing races have different experiences of United States culture, society, economics, and politics and will bring those perspectives with them. Likewise, men and women will bring varying perspectives, as will persons of different ethnic backgrounds, ages, economic circumstances. While we may all carry a United States passport that may be where our experience of what it means to live in the U.S. stops. There may be widely differing understandings and expressions of theology as well. It is important to take time to honor differences and to communicate with one another about the differences you discover.

The purpose of the trip is not to see all you can see or even complete all the projects you anticipated. The larger purpose of the trip is mutual transformation of several things:

- ourselves and our own understandings
- our hosts' understandings of themselves and of us
- our relationships with one another
- our mutual understanding of and commitment to being the church of Jesus Christ in and for the world

The biggest transformation, the most challenging, may be within your own community rather than with those you meet as part of the trip's itinerary. One of the greatest enrichments of an experience such as the one ahead of you is the presence of different perspectives. When you see them as gifts, the variety of viewpoints become positive elements in the trip rather than issues with which you have to contend. Recognize the gifts and seek a Pentecost experience with your group, as well as with the people with whom you meet and work.

■ *Reflection Questions*

1. Have you had the experience of being in a place where a language was spoken that you did not understand? How did you feel in that situation?
2. Consider a conflict situation, that you are familiar with, in which the parties involved found a way to move beyond that which kept them from communicating. How did that situation feel before the breakthrough and after the breakthrough?

3. Recall a time in your life when you experienced God's grace in the midst of conflict. Perhaps you found yourself growing through a conversation that led to reconciliation. Perhaps you discovered a deeper peace in your self because you had moved through an argument while retaining respect for the other party. What enabled grace, reconciliation, and peace to occur? What emotions did you feel in the process?
4. How may these learnings be applied to the trip?

Time taken to facilitate communication is not "lost" time. While not every setting may be appropriate for this, it is important to construct the schedule in such a way that there will be opportunities to develop communication about different experiences, perspectives, and opinions in the group, and to deal with conflicts that may arise.

■ **Leading the Group**

Once you reach the primary place of your trip's focus or of your service project, you will need to give participants a little time to get adjusted. On a long trip, this may include an early bedtime and awareness of jet lag. On a shorter trip, or one within the same time zone, it may mean getting used to accommodations, doing a little exploring, tending to physical needs for food and sleep. Where possible, it is wise to do the orientation on the first day of the trip if you have gathered participants for the first time at an airport en route to your destination or at the destination itself. It is also wise to plan

active things for that first day, rather than a series of speakers in whose presence jet-lagged trip members may fall asleep!

Remember that every part of the trip is food for thought. The banquet does not begin when you arrive, it begins when you leave home—or perhaps sooner! Participants may have significant adventures even before you arrive at your destination. Try to check in with people individually on their initial travel experience. Inquire during the group time about any mishaps or serendipities en route!

■ Ways to Work toward Engagement, Community, and Reflection

■ Community Time

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks you have is scheduling community time. Creating time and space for reflection and sharing every day is not easy. First of all, you will have at least two different types of people, morning people and night people, and bridging this gap may require some finesse. For some folks, getting up early in order to have significant time before leaving for the day's activities or for the work project is attractive. For some folks who don't wake up fully until mid- or late morning, an evening gathering is preferred, even if it is after a long and intense day. You will not please everybody all the time in terms of scheduling. You may want to alternate morning and night as the time for extended community time, or at least not schedule all

mornings or all evenings. You may also want to be alert to opportunities during the day to gather folks in the midst of things. For example, one group arrived early for a church service on Sunday afternoon in a small town in Croatia. They went into the bombed-out sanctuary, stood in a circle, and engaged in a time of prayer and meditation before turning to the manse next door where the service was held.

■ Morning and Evening Prayer

Beginning each day and ending each day with a time of prayer puts a frame on the day. It keeps the day's work or activities within the context of faith. These prayer times do not need to be extensive. A brief, well-chosen Scripture, a short opportunity for silence, a spoken prayer by you or by someone else in the group, can work well. Morning prayers may include some thought related to the day, a brief quotation, a hymn, even a well-selected word or phrase to mull over as a centering point during the day. Morning prayers may also provide an opportunity to lift up concerns or anticipations for the day. Evening prayers may repeat or vary from the pattern of morning prayer. They may include opportunities for intercessory prayers that lift up persons you have met during the day, situations you have encountered, experiences you have had individually or as a group. Intercessory prayer time may offer participants the opportunity to name loved ones back home, family, friends, colleagues, or

situations at home or elsewhere in the world about which they are concerned. After a long day, you may choose to close the day with a hymn or a reading that sums up or highlights something in the day. Prayer is not about words, but about relationships. The spoken or sung words assist us in being present with God so that God may speak to us. The spoken or sung words also may help us to focus and give voice to our own needs, concerns, and intentions in the presence of God. Sometimes, the words allow us to let go and to let ourselves be carried along on the faith and love of the community. Sometimes we simply need to be cradled in the “everlasting arms of God.”

■ Briefing and Debriefing

Briefing and debriefing is not the same as worship time. The purpose of briefing is the communication of essential information; the purpose of debriefing is the opportunity to share experiences.

Briefing should include a lay-out of the day, and a check-in on people’s health and general well-being. You can do this with a brief “check-in” time, either going around the circle or in popcorn fashion allowing each person to speak and to choose a word or phrase that represents the state of their being on that day. The check-in may surface something that needs more group attention or your personal attention. You can then schedule group time to attend to it, or make a mental note to intentionally

connect with a person or persons during the day.

Debriefing at the close of the day may include anything from a significant time for digesting and reflecting on the events of the day to a simple circle “roundup” where each person is given the opportunity to concisely name what has been most meaningful or most important event of the day. Also it may be a good opportunity to gather questions and perhaps to answer or discuss a few. Again, it is important to check in on the health and well-being of participants. If there have been conflicts or problems during the day, this may be the time to deal with them.

Even though you plan for the briefing and debriefing times each day, there may be days when, due to intractable schedules, you must delete or minimize your plans. Such is the life of a trip leader. You cannot always control the schedule. Late buses, unexpected additions to the day’s itinerary, and surprises of all sorts are USUAL in group travel and are part of, not apart from, the learnings of the trip. Stay creative. Use the surprises, even the frustrations, as teachable moments. Let the interruptions be gifts that expand your understanding rather than shrink your patience. Most of all, let yourself have a sense of humor about the unavoidable glitches. Laugh and the others will laugh with you!

You may combine the time for briefing or debriefing with the worship/prayer time, especially on very full days. If you do this, it

may be helpful to take a candle with you to light as the demarcation of prayer time and worship space.

■ Reflection Time

While each day optimally holds some time for processing what is happening to the group, and, no doubt, informal conversation happens as well, it is essential that you set aside longer times for intentional sharing and reflection. In-depth dialogue and real wrestling with the issues of the trip need a spacious climate in which to emerge. When possible, it is good to select a time when people are rested and when rushing to the next event will not encroach on the reflection time.

■ Vulnerability and Trust

A spacious time frame is not the only aspect of a climate that fosters the willingness of participants to struggle with issues. The group must have a sense that they can trust each other not to belittle an opinion, not to dismiss a question, not to demean another member. In an unfamiliar place, we may tend to put on protective roles or to erect protective walls around the most tender parts of our personality. If the group is to become a community in which transformation is possible, welcomed, and expected through dialogue with one another, then members of the group will have to risk vulnerability. People usually are willing to risk some vulnerability if they feel the group is safe and trustworthy.

Encourage in the group an atmosphere of respect, humility, compassion, empathy, and acceptance. You may want to establish a group covenant which includes an agreement about what may be shared beyond the confines of the group.

■ Processing and Speaking

Some participants are more comfortable than others in jumping into discussions. For them, a growth point may be in remaining quiet. For others who find it more difficult to get into a conversation or to voice their thoughts, a growth point may be in speaking out. Some people discover what they think as they speak. Others learn by keeping silent, mulling, and musing, and will eventually speak if they are given the chance. Often they will have distilled the conversation and will offer a nugget of wisdom; they will take a piece of rock-hard information or experience and discover the diamond in it. Remember that silence in this context is not empty. Some people will need that time to let their words emerge from a place deep within. *Honor the silence as much as you honor the speech.* There is much going on within people that is “in process” and needs time to ripen. Rushing for a response may cut off the process rather than assisting it. Discipline yourself not to “rescue the conversation” or rush into the silence in order to “keep things going.”

You may want to read a small book by Gunilla Norris titled *Sharing Silence*.⁸ This is an excellent resource for use with groups as they come to understand the power of silence and its political nature and impact. It may also be helpful to share Norris's perspective on silence with the group to give them permission to respect and honor the silences that may rise and punctuate their conversation, the way a "rest" mark does in a great symphony.

See Resources for Experiencing the Trip, page 109, for ideas on inclusive group conversation during group time.



■ From Reporting to Reflecting

At the end of each day as you debrief, you may find that people do more reporting than reflecting. For some this will indicate a personality more keyed to facts as a natural way of processing experience. For others it may signal the need for more time and space to sort through the events of the day in order to go beyond recalling and naming them. Or simple reporting may be a symptom of fatigue. Unless you have reserved a significant amount of time and have scheduled a rest or break before beginning, when you ask for reflections you

may only receive a report: the facts, and just the facts, of the day.

You need to find not only space in the schedule, but also a physical space that is conducive to reflection. Cramped seating, noisy competition from the surrounding environment, visual distractions such as

people walking through a public place, may all impede your purpose, which is to focus on what is happening to and with participants on the inner journey of the soul.

Recognizing that the

optimum in scheduling and location are not always possible, it will be beneficial to seek the best that is possible and use it well.

When the optimum is not available, acknowledge that with the group and ask for their attention and cooperation.

Now the really tough part: the move from reporting to reflecting involves risk—on your part and on the part of the participants. It involves moving beneath the apparent, the superficial, the surface layer of the trip to engage the emotional and spiritual aspects of persons. It involves a vulnerability, a willingness to reveal oneself, to move out of the comfort zone into confrontation with what one is experiencing on the outer journey and into directly meeting the issues being raised on the inner journey. If you are

8. Gunilla Norris, *Sharing Silence: Mindful Practice and Mindful Living* (New York: Bell Tower, 1992).

not willing and able to do this, if you are not actively aware on this level yourself, it will be more difficult to invite others to this kind of intimate exposure. However, for transformation to occur, some exposure of this sort is nearly always necessary, and nearly always needs nurture and support to continue.

Be aware as you move to this level of conversation, that there may be persons in your group whose personal lives hold experiences or issues that reduce their willingness, or readiness, or ability to share on a deep level. For instance, a woman who has experienced domestic violence may encounter on the trip stories of violence similar to her own. She may not be able to participate freely in a conversation about that encounter. A man whose son is mentally or physically challenged may have difficulty in responding in conversation regarding a visit to a school for children with similar mental or physical challenges. For many good reasons, participants may be unable to risk themselves in intimate conversation on certain topics. Respect each person and his or her boundaries.

■ Nurture Dialogue

There is a difference between dialogue and debate. We are interested in dialogue. There is a difference between discussion (cutting things apart) and conversation (bridging gaps in our personal understandings and group awareness). We are interested in conversation. People may need to be

reminded that it is fine to have strong personal opinions, but it is inappropriate to require them of others or to use the group reflection time to try to convince the rest of the group of one's own point of view. Give people permission to leave things hanging. In other words, it is not necessary to answer every question, solve every problem, "fix or finish" other participants' statements, their processes, or their experiences. While the group may indeed come to consensus on an issue or on a response to an experience, or on a follow-up action, it is not necessary for this to happen in order for the trip to be a success or for individuals to have a personally transforming experience. If group consensus is forced, it may serve to disenfranchise participants who resist the consensus. Keeping an open dialogue, and affirming an ongoing conversation are as much the responsibility of the leader as is asking the tough questions that invite the dialogue and conversation in the first place. See Resources for Experiencing the Trip, pages 109–122, for activities to nurture dialogue and reflection.

■ Encourage Social Analysis

Social analysis will happen! Either intentionally or unintentionally, guided or unguided, participants will be observing the social structures, political climate, economic systems, and cultural expressions of the place they visit. When we move into another culture, we naturally compare what we see with what is familiar to us. It may be helpful to use a structured experience to

assist participants in looking closely at the culture in which they find themselves. This does two things: (a) it offers participants tools with which to work, and (b) it offers the context of community in which they may check out their personal perceptions, revise narrow understandings, expand information and awareness. Social analysis happens as participants share their varied responses to the group's common experience.

See the section titled "Cross-Cultural Activities," in *Resources for Experiencing the Trip*, pages 117–119, for exercises to encourage social analysis.

■ Love the Questions

■ *Reflection Questions for Leaders*

These questions are to help you reflect on your experience and what is happening in the group. You may want to use them as part of your personal review of the day.

1. As I think about today's experience, what stands out most for me?
2. What has gone well? What has not gone well? How can I change things so that tomorrow will go better?
3. How is the group "jelling?" What signs do you see of the group becoming a community? What more can I do to assist this process?
4. Is there anyone who consistently remains on the fringe of the group? From time to time people may need some space apart from the group and

may choose to sit by themselves on a bus or at a meal. This is certainly legitimate and even to be encouraged as part of self-care on the trip. However, if this is a consistent pattern, it is worth noting and dealing with in a direct way with either the individual, the group, or both.

5. Is anyone consistently pulling the group in his or her direction—manipulating, dominating, or controlling the group or individuals in the group? Such behavior would include one person doing most of the talking, or someone lobbying for her or his agenda to replace all or part of the group's agenda. You may have to take steps to deal with the behavior directly.
6. What am I noticing about my leadership style as I move through the trip experience? How am I being stretched? When and why am I shutting down? Do I need or want to change this at this time? How?

■ Supplemental Questions for Teachable Moments

These questions may be helpful to have in your hip pocket for teachable moments. A teachable moment is one of those unpredictable times when all of a sudden someone says or does something that may highlight an understanding or invite the group into deeper encounter, or stir a prayer, or evoke an opportunity to pursue an issue. It is helpful to have some sense of how to introduce a question at that moment, to have in mind a way to overlay the immediate experience with a moment

of reflection right then and there. Tailor these to your particular trip situation and the core issues it raises. It may be appropriate at a moment of deep apprehension of the holy or sacred nature of a person or event to invite participants into a time of silence, either letting that “sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12 NRSV) speak itself, or allowing it to be a prelude to the question and more silent reflection or conversation.

1. How are we meeting “Emmanuel” in this time and place? How is “God with us” in this moment?
2. How are we experiencing the authentic humanity of Christ in this moment? How are we receiving, sharing, giving, manifesting the “new community of God’s peace” at this time?
3. Is there a call to action in this moment? Is there a call to prayer in this moment? Is there a call to sing in this moment, in praise, in sorrow, in solidarity? Is there a call to speak or respond in this moment—to one another in the group or to others present?

■ Questions to Offer Participants for Their Ongoing Reflection on the Trip

1. What is growing in me through this experience?
2. What is being challenged in me through this experience?
3. What is being affirmed in me through this experience?
4. What is being called forth from me in this experience?

5. Is there a specific new commitment and call to action for the future which is emerging for me?
6. To what extent am I participating in this experience? Am I as open as I would like to be to what I am hearing, seeing, feeling? Am I sharing as much as I want to share of what I am thinking and feeling? Am I connecting with the group at the level that feels right to me and is conducive to building Christian community among participants?

Please see Resources for Experiencing the Trip, pages 109–122, for suggested activities to do with the group during the trip.

■ Further Resources

Broyles, Anne, ed. *Ways of Justice, Ways of Peace: Words to Sustain the Spirit*. Methodist Federation for Social Action (212 E. Capitol St. NE, Washington, DC 20003), 1993.

A year’s worth of quotations bringing together the life of the spirit and the life of social action.

Hampson, Tom, and Loretta Whalen, eds. *Make a World of Difference: Creative Activities for Global Learning*. New York: Friendship Press, 1991.

Offers a wealth of creative activities for learning in the global classroom. The focus is on global interdependence and international development.

Leadingham, Carrie, Joann E. Moschella, and Hilary M. Vartanian, eds. *Peace Prayers: Meditation, Affirmations, Invocations, Poems, and Prayers for Peace*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992.

A wonderful collection of prayers and thoughts usable in a variety of contexts on the trip. It might be called “spiritual fast food!” It is small book and easily tucked into a purse, backpack, or other carrying bag.