

### 3. Resources for Preparing to Re-enter Our Culture

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## ■ Activity Plan for Processing and Evaluating

1. **CENTERING.** Gather in a circle. Perhaps you will want to invite each person to bring an object or souvenir that has been purchased, received as a gift, or found during the trip. These items may be used as the centerpiece of the circle or retained for initial sharing. Begin in silence. Suggest that the participants center themselves in the place and in the presence of God.
  
2. **VIEWING THE PERSONAL "VIDEO."** After a couple of minutes, invite the participants to review the trip as if it were a video passing before their eyes. Give them suggestions along the way to provide a skeletal focus. Something like: "Begin as you left home . . . what were you feeling . . . thinking. . . . Recall your arrival at the group meeting place and your first encounters with other travelers. . . . Think about the first day . . . the surprises . . . any difficulties . . . the general feel of the initial exposure to a new place." Proceed with specific reminders of the events of the trip, some of the people you met, places you visited, work you did, things you learned. Name times of laughter and tears, great joys or deep sorrows common to the whole group. Allow pauses between the suggestions in order for individuals to fill in the blanks with their personal experiences. As you come to the end of the trip, invite the participants to survey the totality of the experience and to pick one person and one place (be rigid about this; choosing is difficult, but not to choose in this case is to waffle and lose the potency of the exercise). Allow a brief time of silence again and then invite the group to return their attention to the circle.
  
3. **GIFTING THE GROUP WITH NAMES.** In a quick go-round, ask each person to share with the group the name of the person they chose. Do not allow cross-talking or commenting. In a second quick go-round ask individuals to name the places they chose. Again, do not allow cross-talking or commenting. Simply allow the names and places to be honored as nonmaterial gifts of the trip. It is not necessary for members of the group to explain to one another the why of their choices; much more will happen in the iceberg of self underneath the surface of this minimalist sharing. Later, in informal conversation, some participants may choose to share with one another why they chose a certain person or place. Or someone may refer to their choice in the reflection time. At this point, however, simply receive the choices.
  
4. **OFFERING OBJECTS.** If you have asked participants to bring objects, invite them in "popcorn" fashion (not a go-round) to display their objects for the group and in a minute or two say why they chose the object (it may or may not relate to the person or place). Some people may have chosen something in joy, some in sorrow, some in humor, some after intense wrestling. All are gifts of the experience. When the last person has shared, you may want to

pause for a spoken prayer that gives thanks for these object-gifts, the people-gifts, the place-gifts and all the gifts of the trip to which these gifts also point.

5. **TALKING ABOUT LEARNINGS.** Having affirmed gifts, you may want to open a conversation that focuses on primary learnings of the trip, persisting questions, revelations, insights, wonderings, dreams, and hopes that have emerged. This may also be a good time to begin to introduce the question of what commitment to interpretation and action participants will make.

6. **EVALUATING.** At this point, a stretching break may be in order. When the group returns, pass out the written evaluation forms. Give the participants a brief overview of the evaluation, noting the general categories, and telling them when you want the completed forms. (Hint: Pick a time prior to departure for the airport!) For a sample trip evaluation form, see *When God's People Travel Together: A Trip Leader's Planning Manual*, pages 63–64.

You may want to allow a short time for oral evaluation by the whole group. What went well? What was disappointing? What was most important in terms of their growth? What parts of the itinerary or work project did they appreciate? What was least helpful? What would they recommend to the next planners and leaders if such a trip is done again? You may also invite the group to evaluate itself. How attentive were they as a group? How well did they listen? How carefully did they respond? Had they done their homework before coming so that they could ask appropriate questions and seek helpful information? How well did they support one another and care for one another? Did they become a community or remain a group of individuals?

Add questions to personalize the evaluation and ignore those that do not apply.

## ■ Making a Graceful Re-entry

### ■ Make a Manifest

Turning toward home means not just packing bags and ensuring the safe travel of souvenirs, it means also thinking ahead to the re-entering of one's home culture, family, friendship circle, local community, church, workplace, and daily routines. It may be helpful to construct a "manifest" of what the group is carrying home. (A manifest is a list of what a ship or plane is carrying.) To make a group manifest, give each participant a piece of paper. Tell the participants not to put their names on the papers. Invite the group to think of the NON-material things they are taking home with them. Each person writes an item at the top of the sheet and passes it to the left. Again, each person writes an item on the sheet and passes it to the left. This continues until there are no more items to list, or until you think that most people have "declared" what they are taking into the home place with them. It may be that

some people finish their “luggage list” before others. They then can simply pass the paper on. Go around the circle and have each person read the list that she or he ended up with. A sample list could include specific vivid memories that seem to haunt or linger, a recognition of the complexity of the problems of the place visited, a new self-confidence from having had a first experience in international travel, a feeling of exhilaration from completing the trip, an immense tiredness from too little sleep and too much input. This exercise gets people thinking about the invisible things that they carry home and offers an initial opportunity to think about how they will deal with them as they begin re-entry.

You may want to introduce some specific words of wisdom about going-home plans. Here are a few suggestions—words of wisdom for you to remember, words of wisdom for you to share with participants.

### ■ Things to Remember

Go through the following reminders with the participants. Ask them to make a note of the four points. Invite participants to take a few moments to write down things they will do when they get home in response to the four points.

1. THE TRIP MAY BE OVER, BUT THE EXPERIENCE WILL CONTINUE TO UNFOLD. New thoughts, feelings, insights, and awarenesses will continue to arise in odd moments for days, weeks, and months after you get off the plane. It is important to make time and space for continuing reflection and debriefing to happen.
2. THE PEOPLE YOU COME HOME TO HAVE ALSO HAD EXPERIENCES WHILE YOU WERE AWAY. Ask the person who picks you up from the airport what has happened in her or his life while you were gone—and listen to the response! It is important to listen to how the soccer game went, what a spouse did to get the washing machine fixed, how a friend is doing in a job search. It is important to remember you are rejoining an ongoing stream of life, having been out of it for a time. Collect the stories your family, friends, and coworkers want to tell as a means of reconnecting. They will want to hear from you too, but perhaps not immediately, and perhaps not as much as you need to tell.
3. REST. REST. REST. Returning home, whether or not it includes some jet lag, means honoring your body’s need to relax after the trip, and your mind’s need to pull back from the intensity of the intellectual activity in which you have engaged, and your heart’s need to process all you have seen and heard, and your spirit’s need for some spacious and open time.

4. **BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF.** Don't expect to fit right back into things immediately. Ideally, it is a good practice to allow yourself at least a day or two, to re-enter before you have to function at peak performance. If that is not possible, at least reduce your expectations and let yourself off the hook of having to perform at the same intensity and level as before you left.

## ■ Transition Tools

### ■ Writing

Participants have been writing on the trip, in the group journal, in individual journals, and on postcards. Encourage participants to continue to reflect on their experiences through writing. Writing serves a double purpose. Some people may choose to write a newspaper or magazine article, a sermon, or a poem to share in the church newsletter as a means not only of continuing their own reflection, but also of interpreting their experience to others.

### ■ Talking

Participants have had the support and challenge of the group for the time of the trip itself. Being home alone—without the group—may be difficult. Encourage each participant to identify one person who will listen to the participant's reflections without needing to comment, respond, or tell his or her own story. Participants can arrange for their personal listeners before they begin the trip. It may be that the listener is the same one to whom the participant has sent the journal-postcards of the trip. See postcard suggestion in The Short Report under Journal Writing on page 96.

### ■ A Meditation

(Note: You may choose to lead the group through this meditation. You will find several dots (. . . . .) throughout the meditation. They are a signal that this is a place to allow a time of silence for participants to reflect on the question. A shorter string of dots indicates a shorter pause. Invite the participants to sit comfortably, to relax, and to focus on something that will help them to center themselves for the next few minutes.)

Close your eyes if that is helpful to you. Breath deeply: in and out . . . in and out. . . . Gently let this question arise with your breathing, arise out of the silence: "How will you re-enter?" For a moment, simply let the question hang there and notice what begins to appear to you as you think about it. . . . .

Think ahead to the first couple of days back home. . . . . Will someone meet you at the airport? . . . Who? . . . Is it someone you can talk to immediately about the experience you

have had . . . or is that person just a ride home? . . . Is it someone who may need your immediate attention for themselves? . . . . .

Who awaits you when you arrive home? Will you be alone? . . . Will your family be there? . . . Will friends be there? . . . . .

What is the first day like, the first week? How full is your schedule? . . . Are home or work worries already buzzing in your mind? . . . What do you HAVE to get done? . . . What could you let go of, if you need to? . . . . .

What are you most looking forward to? . . . Is there anything you are not looking forward to? . . . . .

During the first days of being home, what will you miss about your time on the trip? . . . . .

Which people, either in the group or others whom you have met along the way, would you like to keep in contact with? . . . . .

What changes do you want to make in your life as a result of this experience? . . . How will you begin to make those changes happen? . . . . .

What is the most important thing you want to remember about what you have witnessed, done, experienced? . . . . .

In one more moment of silence, simply let all the questions and your thoughts in response to them settle in your mind. Click the "save" option on your internal computer. Now return to the group.

(Without processing the whole meditation or expecting everyone to share something, ask, "Are there any 'ahas' out of this meditation that you want to share with the group?" There may be none. Or a few. Or a lot. Just let the conversation go as it will for whatever time seems appropriate to the need to share.)

If you have worked the previous section as a whole, it is probably a good time to take a break before working with the last two aspects going home.

## ■ Exercises for Interpretation Tools and Tips

With the group do a series of exercises to help them think through their responses to the question, "How was your trip?" These exercises correspond to the material on Handout 7, "Interpretation Tools and Tips."

### ■ What to Interpret

Ask the group to think about what is the most important thing they want to communicate about the trip. Invite responses to this around the circle. In verbalizing a response to this question people begin to hear themselves speak in the interpretation mode about their experiences. Encourage participants to write their answer and to refer to it often as they prepare their interpretation events, writings, conversations, etc. Mention, however, that with time their idea of the most important message to communicate may change.

### ■ How to Interpret

Ask the participants to consider the different ways in which they might interpret the experience. You may give some suggestions to help stimulate thought: Speaking? Writing? Preaching? Teaching? Invite participants to share some thoughts on this. As one person hears another's list, she or he may find a new mode for interpretation.

### ■ To Whom

Ask the group to come up with ideas about who their audience might be (for example: children, youth, adults, special interest groups, congregations, presbytery, community organizations, or the general public). When you think about the "who," you come up with different questions about methods and resources. You may want to talk with the group about thinking through what the presentations might be, and how the preparation they do for one group will be different for another. Doing a children's sermon on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina will require different sensitivities than addressing a gathering of residents in an older adult assisted living center. Speaking to a church group that shares theological language is different than speaking to the public where there may or may not be a theological or faith base.

### ■ Where to Interpret

Invite group conversation about the interpretation commitment in general. If some participants have had previous experience with interpreting, ask them to tell about some of their successes and flops (both are instructive). There may be a great well of group wisdom about how to get an article in the local paper, how to get on the docket of the presbytery,

how to “market” yourself to other congregations in the presbytery (for adult education, family night potluck, or youth group presentations, for example), how to make contact with Presbyterian Women groups in the presbytery for local programs or presbyterial presentations, how to let a community college or local university know of your experience so you may share in a class. Ask participants to think about how they could utilize the Christmas letter as a tool of interpretation. Appoint a scribe who will take down all suggestions. Keep the list and send it out to participants after they are home. Individual participants also might think about developing Web pages about their trip and placing their photos on their sites. Help people think outside the box.

### ■ The Thirty-Second Response

Invite participants to develop a thirty-second response to “How was your trip?” After they have had a chance to develop their answers, ask for volunteers to role-play the situation. One person can ask the question “How was your trip?” and another can practice his or her thirty-second answer. The questioner can then listen (or not) and make some response. The role play will give participants an opportunity not only to try out their thirty-second interpretive piece, but also to anticipate different responses to it, from the shutdown, to “Hey, great. Gotta go,” to “Tell me more,” to “Would you come talk to my Rotary Club about that?”

### ■ The Five-Minute Moment for Mission

Ask the group to divide themselves into smaller groups of about three persons. Talk about the three things they can strive to put into a five-minute moment for mission (one trip story, a connection to a biblical story, the connection with the partnership work of the PC(USA). Ask each individual to select a story from the trip. Invite people to share their stories with the others in their small group, and then to brainstorm Bible stories or passages that would relate to the individual trip stories. Then ask participants, still in their small groups, to help one another describe the PC(USA) commitment in the area and how the PC(USA) works in partnership with churches and other groups there.

### ■ The Longer Presentation

Ask the participants to continue in their small groups as they think about how they could engage their listeners’ five senses in a longer presentation. Invite them to make lists of items they are taking home that could be used to help interpret the trip. Ask the small groups to share their ideas with the larger group.



## ■ Action and Involvement: Answers to the “What Can I Do?” Question

When trip participants give presentations, some listeners will want to know what they can do, how they can help, how they can be in partnership, how they can become involved. Participants need to have a handy list of ideas they can share in response to the “What can I do?” question. The list should span a range of possibilities from the simplest to the most involved, including the suggestion that the questioner go on a similar trip. Of course, the To-Do list is not just for other people. It also can be a list of ways the participants can remain involved after the trip. The following activities correspond to material on Handout 8.

### ■ The To-Do List

Ask participants to divide themselves into groups of four or five people. Invite each smaller group to develop its list of suggested things to do. Then have the groups share their lists aloud with one another. Encourage individual participants to write their own copies of the list. When they get home they can edit their list, duplicate it, and hand it out at their presentations.

Talk with participants about the resources available to assist them in their interpretation through the offices at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville and other resources that may be helpful as they engage in telling the story.

### ■ Conversation Starters

As the participants wonder about how they will be able to witness to what they have seen and heard on the trip, you might help the process by initiating conversation around the following topics.

PRAYER. You may want to point participants to 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 creating action.”<sup>1</sup>

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

Some possible conversation starters:

- How is prayer an act of co-creation?
- As intercessors, how do we believe the future into being?
- What power does prayer have?

**PERSONAL LIFESTYLE EVALUATION AND CHANGE.** As participants assess their own lives in light of what they have seen and experienced, and with the insights they have brought home, some of them may be led to make personal changes. This may range from changing the way they talk about the world (revisit with them the power of language), to choosing to live on less (living more simply so others may simply live).

Some possible conversation starters:

- What insights have you gained about lifestyle?
- What changes might you wish to make, if any, in your lifestyle?
- Why would comfortable North Americans want to change their lifestyle?

**FACING ISSUES.** It may take some work to sift through the mass of information the group has obtained (perhaps some of it conflicting) 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 the participants to commit to addressing these same issues each in her or his 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.

Some possible conversation starters:

- At this point, what issues do you think we have encountered on this trip?
- Pick an issue. How could you address this issue at home?

**MONETARY AND TIME COMMITMENTS.** Invite the participants into a conversation about making monetary and time commitments as a way of staying connected and involved with the place or issues of the trip.

Some possible conversation starters:

- How can you maintain your involvement through monetary and time commitments?
- What possibilities are there for monetary and time commitments?

**PARTNERSHIP AND NETWORKS.** Have a conversation with the group about the possibilities of partnering and networking through the denomination. Contact information is in Handout 8.

**ADVOCACY.** Having been moved and changed, even transformed in their understanding of a situation in a particular part of the world, participants may choose to advocate for that area or group of people. Invite the participants to brainstorm avenues of advocacy, different ways that they can advocate. Help participants understand that there are many ways to go about advocacy, and that they may choose to advocate in the way that is most appealing to them or that fits their personality best.

## ■ Covenant for Continued Connection

The group may want to make a covenant to keep in touch for a period of time following the trip. This would maintain community, albeit scattered, for the re-entry time. It is a good thing to remain in touch with someone who knows your experience, to whom you do not need to explain everything, who will understand your “shorthand” about the trip, and who has real-life references for your memories. It also allows interchange of ideas about interpretation and action. If the group chooses to make such a covenant, be clear about who will serve as a primary instigator of communication. This may be you as the leader, but it may also be someone else in the group. Strive for clarity on exactly what it is that the group and individuals in the group are committing to do. For example, the participants might agree to send samples of interpretive pieces to one another, or to pray for one another, or to contribute to a round-robin letter by e-mail or postal mail once a month for a certain number of months. Or the commitment might include specific assignments that participants take on (I will do such-and-such by this date) to which they are willing to be held accountable.

Affirm the covenant for continued commitment during the group’s final worship. You might have someone write the covenant and invite everyone to sign it. During worship the participants can present the covenant as an offering. After you get home send a copy to each participant.

Some groups have found it useful to create e-mail groups as a way to stay in touch. Electronic, e-groups limit membership and access to those invited to participate, in this case, participants of the trip. You can set up free e-groups through many major servers, such as Yahoo! groups.

## ■ Naming the Gifts

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You might do this activity as part of the closing worship. One by one, speak the name of each person in the group. Invite members of the group to identify what the individual named has given to the group (or to them personally). Often persons don't recognize the gifts they bring to a group; more often, groups don't take the time to acknowledge the gifts of their members. Let participants speak in popcorn fashion. If you alert people ahead of time that you will be doing this activity they will have a chance to thoughtfully consider the contributions of others.