



Best practices:

What makes for a good mission trip experience?

Mission trips are journeys in more than one way. They are:

- **Physical journeys.** Participants travel from one place to another. They enter another culture, sometimes with a new language. They experience new sights, sounds, smells and sensations.
- **Emotional journeys.** Mission trips evoke a full range of emotional responses in participants, from fear to joy.
- **Intellectual journeys.** Participants learn new customs, new understandings, new skills in analyzing and communicating and new ways of seeing the world.
- **Spiritual journeys.** Many faith questions are raised during mission trips. Faith can be deepened and broadened, or not, depending on the content or schedule of the trip and how questions and experiences during the trip are reflected upon.

From the experience of numerous trip leaders, participants and mission workers, the best mission trips include the following components:

1. **Thoughtful and intentional trip planning before, during and after the experience.**
 - a. Plan a robust orientation for team members. It's not unusual to meet several times before the trip. See No. 4.
 - b. Develop trip goals together with the host partner rather than telling the host partner what your group wants to do or accomplish.
 - c. If possible, create long-term goals that last beyond the trip and relate with your church's mission involvement and local ministries.
 - d. Take into account the needs of the host church/community and the needs of the mission team.
 - e. Include team-building activities and devotionals when planning the trip program schedule.
 - f. Keep in mind that the most important goal of all is to simply be with the people of the host community. Your presence can be the most powerful way to serve in God's mission. It's good to plan, but plan also to be flexible and let the Spirit move.

**Mission Toolkit:
Short-Term Mission**



Visit pcusa.org/toolkits/short-term-mission/GO for trip leader resources to prepare for, plan, guide and follow up on a mission trip.



2. Healthy partnerships both locally and with the host church or community.

- a. Connect with presbytery partnerships or with other local congregations in the U.S. If you are seeking a place to go to, your church may find that there are trips you can join rather than starting something from scratch or going it alone.
- b. Internationally, partner with PC(USA) partner churches and institutions. PC(USA) mission co-workers often serve as liaisons and work with the global partners to host groups.
- c. Seek mutuality in relationships. Partnership is the way Presbyterians “do mission.” See the “Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership” policy statement: pcusa.org/partnership.
- d. Communicate with Presbyterian Mission Agency staff for resources and guidance.

3. Thoughtful leader selection and preparation.

- a. Consider the gifts and skills of a potential trip leader. Invite a leader who has experience with the trip location and culture, and who is emotionally stable and spiritually mature.
- b. When possible, establish shared trip leadership. It can be helpful to have more than one leader on the trip with complementary knowledge and skills.
- c. Ensure that trip leaders have resources and time for their own spiritual reflection, prayer and study for their journey as leaders before, during and after the trip.

4. Deliberate participant selection, orientation and preparation.

- a. Invite potential participants to an application and discernment process. Don't assume that every person who wants to go on a trip should go.
- b. Once the team is formed, take time for team-building and get-to-know-you activities.
- c. Write a group covenant together and talk about conflict resolution before the trip.
- d. Engage team members in biblical reflection and group prayer.
- e. During team orientation, include the following areas for study:
 - i. Cross-cultural sensitivity and communication knowledge and skills.
 - ii. Sustainable development. Have study and conversation on when charity is necessary (in a crisis) and when charity can cause more harm than good. See *Faith in Action: Understanding Development Ministries from a Christian Perspective* and *Interactive Sessions for Faith in Action: Understanding Development Ministries from a Christian Perspective*.

Best practices



- iii. Knowledge of place/country and culture as well as any PC(USA) partnership(s) there.
- iv. Specialized skills needed for service projects.

5. Intentional ways to reflect on the experience during the trip.

- a. Integrate worship or devotions into the trip program schedule.
- b. Include times in the schedule for debriefing and reflection. Questions can include the following: What did we experience today? What did we learn? What are we feeling? Where did we see Christ?
- c. When possible, and in communication with host community leaders, seek appropriate ways and times to invite members of the host community or mission site to join the mission team during devotions or worship.
- d. Include time at the end of the trip schedule for a final reflection and trip evaluation, before leaving the mission trip location or country.

6. Follow-up with participants after the trip.

- a. Continue to reflect on the trip experience as a group after the trip is over. Before going on the trip, you can require (or invite) team members to meet at least two times following the trip.
- b. Engage in fellowship and fun activities together after the trip.
- c. Work with trip participants during and after the trip to prepare to share their story after the trip is over. See No. 7.
- d. Mentor participants as they discern God's call in new ways.
- e. Intentional ways to share the experience of the trip with others.
- f. Before departing on the mission trip, begin to establish ways to share the story of the experience upon the group's return.
 - i. Invite one or more trip participants to be prepared to speak about the trip experience after the trip.
 - ii. Before going on the trip, request a time after the trip is over for team members to share a special presentation during or after church, or a "minute for mission" during the service.
 - iii. Invite church members and "goers" to a deeper commitment in God's mission at the congregational, community, presbytery and synod level. Learn about and encourage others to learn about Presbyterian Mission Agency ministries and programs that can help your church take further action and address causes of poverty and violence in the places you visit in God's mission.

Best practices



7. Intentional ways to share the experience of the trip with others.

- a. Before departing on the mission trip, begin to establish ways to share the story of the experience upon the group's return.
 - i. Invite one or more trip participants to be prepared to speak about the trip experience after the trip.
 - ii. Before going on the trip, request a time after the trip is over for team members to share a special presentation during or after church, or a "minute for mission" during the service.
- b. Invite church members and "goers" to a deeper commitment in God's mission at the congregational, community, presbytery and synod level. Learn about and encourage others to learn about Presbyterian Mission Agency ministries and programs that can help your church take further action and address causes of poverty and violence in the places you visit in God's mission.