

The Benefits of Participating on a Mission Trip

Benefits to you

Experience that will stretch you As you experience a different culture, people, and lifestyle you will find your own life experience is stretched. The whole idea of doing something that requires moving out of your “safe zone” is an experience that will affect you forever.

Exposure that will change you On a Mission Team you will be exposed firsthand to needs in a different country/culture. Rarely can one be personally exposed to the starkness of human need and remain unchanged. Coming face to face with authentic needs is to expose yourself to risks and responsibilities that can radically change you.

Education that will enlighten you Reading or hearing about needs in the world can be, and often is, frustrating because you feel powerless to make any significant difference. Mission Team participants have the opportunity to learn issues first hand (from the people they meet) and discover that they as “short-termers” can make a difference once they are home. In addition, this education process enlightens you to the needs that exist in your day-to-day world. Needs that have always been right in front of your eyes now seem new and noticeable. Your awareness and concern become heightened.

Encounters that will affect you Leaving a familiar environment and placing yourself in a situation where you have to trust in God can lead to powerful experiences. A participant encounters a host of new relationships with members of the host community, team members, missionaries, and supporters. All of these encounters are avenues for encounters with God. Furthermore, one cannot be a part of a mission team without encountering oneself. You may not go with this intent, but the whole process may be very revealing.

Benefits to Host Community

What benefits do you and your team offer the members of the church in the host country?

Relational Members of churches in other countries appreciate the relationships they form with team members. They are excited about the possibilities of developing relationships with North American Christians who will pray for and with them in their work. You will find the souvenir requested most by nationals is your address!

Cultural You and your team members are not the only ones having a cultural experience. The host group is often amused by the behavior of their visitors, especially the participation of women in traditionally male tasks.

Affirmation National church members are often renewed and rejuvenated by the simple presence of North Americans who have come to their areas as servants. Your presence, service, and interest all affirm their belief in God’s grace and provision.

Financial Very often God uses the team as a vehicle to answer the prayers of a local congregation. The financial contribution on the field will vary from team to team, but any resources we choose to share can be put to great use (especially in projects on the border).

Benefits to your home church

Outward Focus Often our churches and/or organizations at home can drift into being very inwardly oriented. Energy is focused on only meeting the needs of those who are members or participants. As you and your fellow team members eyes and hearts are opened to the needs that exist in the world, we hope you will carry that concern home with you. Oftentimes the team’s deep concern is a catalyst for stirring up a renewed outward focus for the church. Needs begin to be noticed and addressed in the church’s community that were never or rarely noticed before.

Renewal The personal renewal you experience by participating in a Mission Team may well spark renewal in your home church. There is something incredibly contagious about having ten to fifteen people come back into a local church with a renewed desire to seek and serve God. The stretching and challenging you experience may be a means by which God breathes new life into your group at home.

Community is one of those elusive terms that we often hear talked about at our churches but rarely seem to experience. A Mission Trip challenges you to work, serve, worship, and live with people whom you did not choose. At home we usually choose who we want to be with. Here God has made this choice for us. This team is Gods’ vehicle to train and teach us what it means to pray, to encourage, to work, to listen, and to rely on one another. Experiencing what Jesus describes as the oneness of the Body of believers can have a tremendous impact on your group at home, if you will continue to pursue community.

“Vacations with a Purpose: A Handbook for Your Short-Term Missions Experience”, Chris Eaton and Kim Hurst. 1992. NavPress, Colorado Springs.

AM I A BRIDGE BUILDER?

As a team member you are "plopped" down in a culture quite a bit different from your own. The behaviors, values, and beliefs of the people may differ greatly from those you are used to. With time you may come to notice the common denominators between yourself and your hosts. But the differences will hit you first.

BEING A BRIDGE BUILDER

Cultural differences might be pictured in the following way.

There are two cliffs: On one side is the North American way of life and on the other is the way of life found in the host country. In between looms a large chasm. In order for the two cultures to meet and understand one another a bridge must be built connecting the two sides. Imagine your upcoming journey as an apprenticeship in bridge building. You can lay the beam, erect a scaffolding, and forge cables that make communication between your worlds possible. Surprise your host community with your initiative at bridge building and you will find their hands joining yours.

Building the bridge involves a number of things you can think through before going, as well as others you can work on while you are there. Unfortunately, some people go on short-term teams and never work at building the bridge. They deprive themselves of some very important personal experiences, which tragically limits their understanding and curtails their growth.

Bridge building is an exciting challenge! In fact, we believe you will come to appreciate the world opening to you so much that you will continue to build bridges for the rest of your life.

Bridge Building Involves Examining Your Stereotypes

All of us maintain certain stereotypes about other people. Some are based on elements of truth. Others grow out of myths or false perceptions. It is unfair to judge or evaluate a person based on stereotypes about the group he or she belongs to. God created individuals who are uniquely different, and they should be treated as such.

As you immerse yourself for a time in another culture...

Be present with and really listen to the nationals in that country, especially the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed of society.

Don't be too quick to judge others and when you do make judgments, make them in light of gospel principles and the social teachings of the church.

Remember that justice requires equal respect for all persons and the Bible calls us to have a special concern for the poor and oppressed.

Be open to one another as friends on the basis of a common commitment and mutual trust.

And remember, sharing does include money, persons, and goods; but it also includes spiritual experience, theological insights, cultural heritage, and a host of other "gifts" along the way.

People, Place, and Partnerships, Pg. 32