

# TEN MISSION COMMANDMENTS FOR A HEALTHY GROUP EXPERIENCE

As one of the leaders (or the leader) of the group, there are several key words already in your vocabulary that will be helpful to keep in mind during your visit to the border. We trust they will be helpful in keeping your group centered on the pilgrimage to which they have been called.

1. **Flexibility** Be flexible, adapt! When in Rome do as the Romans. Be flexible enough so that God can use you as needed. If your desire is to glorify God, you will be able to look at situations and happenings in refreshing ways. The opposite of flexible is inflexible and inflexibility is personified by the "ugly American," who knows everything and the best way to do it - usually the way s/he has always done it. For the trip, help your group be flexible and look at new alternative ways of living and seeing God at work in a different culture.

2. **Finding Out** is a call to listen to your hosts to see how they perceive their reality. Listening to them and observing how they cope with their situation will provide you with the raw data necessary to analyze what is going on, why things are the way they are. This will also be helpful to the building up of your group.

3. **Forgiveness** will be as essential for the trip as it is at home. When you travel as a group to an environment different from that which is comfortable to the group, their normal feelings will be put into a pressure cooker of sorts. They will blow faster and they will need to learn how to recognize that and when to forgive themselves and others.

4. **Figuring Out** has to do with analyzing. Help your group raise the right questions. Who has the power in a particular situation? Who do the people listen to and why? Would these questions work for figuring out situations back home?

5. **Frustration** might best be linked with culture shock. Recognizing it and helping the group deal with it will be an important task. The generally recognized stages of culture shock are -"romance", "reaction", "recognition", and "resolution". Romance is just what it sounds like - everything about the culture is wonderful, even the food which I would never eat back home. Reaction sets in when daily activities which you once took for granted are now insurmountable obstacles. At this stage you will hear members of the group making fun of or laughing at events to cover their frustration and anger. Recognition is the first sign of recovery, and generally one's sense of humor returns. The group will begin to recognize cues in the culture and members will cease feeling like square pegs in round holes. On a short trip, some group members may not make it through the whole cycle, and some, with adequate training up front, may be able to jump quickly to Resolution, or the acceptance of the fact that there are at least two ways of doing things equally valuable, just different. This stage permits appreciation for more than one way of doing things.

6. **Feeling** means allowing ourselves to learn by experience. Tests have shown that people remember 20% of what they hear, 40% of what they hear and see, and 80% of what they discover for themselves. Thus it is important to help the group feel and name what they see, hear and touch with all their senses. You can't understand the experience if you've never had the experience.

7. **Forever** is a way of saying that mission education is education for life. Because of our school system which basically treated us as receptacles into which knowledge was poured, we tend to treat the process of learning as having finished when we finished whatever formal level of education we obtained. This concept has been challenged and we believe that the Presbyterian Border Ministry should put teachers and learners together into an immersion type learning experience. Our belief is that this is how significant education happens, and that it will much better prepare God's people to be stewards of creation. Since it is forever, the process must be repeated throughout life. Many educators refer to the process as acting, reflecting on the action and making corrections, so that you can more meaningfully act again.

8. **Follow-up** refers to what you do with your experience back home. Do you bury your talent or will you invest it and produce dividends? We trust that your discoveries will be such that you will want to share them. Significant to your own reflection will be the sharing process. Your insights will be challenged by many who will not be able to understand your experience because they have not had the experience. If you believe in what you learned and want to share the excitement of a mission experience you will follow-up by sharing your experience with others, using whatever gifts God has given you.

9. **Fulfill** the task to which you have been called. Keep your eye on the high calling of Christ such that conflicts (ideological or personal) can be resolved with a spirit of love. Remember that you are not there for group therapy. Agree to disagree from the beginning.

10. **Finish** the journey which you have begun on the border. Hopefully your experience will provide the nudge you've been looking for to get on with your spiritual pilgrimage. Keep your journey alive and continue to grow in grace. Be honest with God and you will finish the race. Keep moments of frustration in perspective, always remembering that the strongest iron comes from the hottest fire.