

Why Do Our Partners Host US Church Groups?

The Presbyterian Church USA is in mission with church partners in over eighty countries around the world. In addition to these denominational relationships, many US presbyteries are in partnership with presbyteries or organizations in other countries, and some congregations have sister church relationships. Just as our own motivations vary, individuals in partner churches, institutions, and organizations around the world offer a variety of reasons for hosting US church groups in their communities:

- Educate US Christians about the country's culture and social, religious, political, and economic context.
- Build relationships with US Christians for sharing of our faith and our mutual transformation
- Encourage interest in and support of their mission efforts in their countries (financial and human resources)
- Educate US Christians about the effects of US foreign policy on their people
- Find partners to stand with them in their struggles against different kinds of oppression
- Build bridges of understanding and love with people who come from different contexts and cultures
- Minister to people from the United States, many of whom are searching for meaning, hope, or faith
- Receive partners for addressing church and society concerns in their country
- Live out their own Christian calling within the global church and the world
- Receive assistance in goods and services for the poor of their countries (food, housing, clinics, schools, etc.)
- Receive encouragement in their ministry to their own people

Some of the reasons given for hosting US church groups are focused on the growth and transformation of the *visiting* group and some are focuses on the *host community's* growth and transformation. Some point to *immediate needs* in the community and/or church and others are focused on *long-term plans* and *commitments*.

As with US mission trip participants, our partners in mission do not speak with one voice concerning their reasons for hosting US church groups. Their reasons are as shaped by their history and present challenges as are ours. But their churches, like ours, also stand on the promises of God to “make all things new” and to transform the church's attempts at faithfulness into a visible sign of God's kingdom to the world and a blessing to the nations. Many of our partners are willing to share with US Christians their experiences, their faith, and their struggles for transformation. Many also yearn for *their own* transformation and the transformation of their churches and societies through their participation *with us* in God's mission in the world.

Perspectives on Partnership in Mission

Being a partner in mission is a challenging enterprise. Yet it is also a blessed adventure and stretching experience for the people of God. God, through scripture, calls us to be partners with God and each other in mission and ministry to our world. But how can we be truly in partnership with those so very different from ourselves? How can we experience mutuality in our relationships when great inequalities in material resources exist?

US churches and our partners-in-mission around the world continue to struggle with barriers to true partnership and mutuality in relationships. It is not only our task but our calling to continue to deepen our understanding and practice of partnership. When planning mission trips, leaders and participants are necessarily engaged in grappling with the idea and practice of partnership and how it can be embodied within the context of a mission trip.

As we engage with others as partners, may we be mutually transformed as God's people, witnessing to the love and justice of God in our own communities and in those far away, placing our hope in the One who gave all so that all might have life—and have it abundantly.

From “When God's People Travel Together, A Trip Leader's Planning Manual”, Debby D. Vial, 1999 Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Church USA, Louisville, KY.