

PLANNING MISSION EXPERIENCES

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Being involved in mission work through the church is a rather simple task. In fact, most people in the church are involved in missions at some level, including your teenagers. Dropping money in an offering plate for a special missions offering, listening to a missionary during the morning service, or participating in fixing “goody bags” for college students are all examples of being involved in missions. But most of these activities, while important and necessary, tend to become monotonous and can even lose their mission emphasis when there is nothing else to supplement them. All of these activities (and many others) are encouraged and should be done by all ages. However, there is a point where people must move from simply being *involved* in missions to being *engaged* in missions.

Becoming engaged in missions moves one to a deeper level of passion, commitment and understanding. Engagement brings a person into a hands-on, personal commitment that results in a greater desire to continue. While missions is such an integral part of our belief system and faith, the actual word “missions” is not even found in the Bible. We take all of what Christ has said and taught, combine it with the message of the Old Testament and the Epistles and find ourselves “duty-bound” to spread the message of Christ around the world.

Becoming engaged in missions begins with three main areas. There is no specific order one must follow. A person can enter this “three-step process” at any point and become actively engaged in missions. Engaging in the process of missions is much like a salvation experience. Some come to know Christ after studying and find out all the facts. Others become actively involved in the life of the church first and then find Christ. And there are

others who feel Christ in their heart first and only then do they seek out knowledge of Him and become active in a local congregation. But, when it is all said and done, a Christian must at some point cycle through all three of these areas. And the cycle never ends but continues to build upon itself as one seeks that deeper relationship and commitment in their faith. So it is with becoming actively engaged in missions.

We Know Missions In Our Head

You do not have to be Christian or even religious to have a head knowledge about serving or helping other people. Being kind, offering a helping hand, volunteering for a support agency, etc. does not require one to have a faith in anything really. But, for these persons, it is merely volunteering to do something good. Habitat for Humanity is a good example. While having Christian beginnings and being largely filled with Christian volunteers, there are countless numbers of people who volunteer and put in many hours who are not Christians.

For those of us who claim to be Christian, our mission involvement should go beyond the obvious physical, mental, financial and social help which we can offer to an individual. There is something very different about helping someone *and* serving them in the name of Jesus Christ. Although the location, scope, expense and actual work we perform may be the exact same, there is a greater purpose behind the *Christian* sense of mission.

Even being Christian and knowing so in one’s mind does not always translate into mission action. There are many Christians who know full well in their minds that something should be done to help “those people” whomever they may be. But *knowing* and actually *doing* are

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two totally different things.

We Feel Missions In Our Heart

Once a person knows in their minds that people around the world need to know of the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ it begins to move something within the soul. A person begins the process of looking into the world with a renewed vision. This is a vision that will not allow them to merely overlook those individuals sitting on the streets and in shelters. A vision that causes their soul to stir and their heart to ache. It is from our heart that compassion evolves. Compassion brings about a desire to understand and to seek ways in which a person can become involved. There are times when we act strictly from our heart without any real knowledge of situations and this can bring about improper motives, misused gifts and talents and a great deal of emotional pain should the situation be found not credible.

If we do not engage our hearts into our mission then it simply becomes a task-oriented job. We may have full knowledge of what is happening and we may also put our hands to work but if we have no heart for the cause then we lose out on true purpose, sincerity, and compassion. While we gain knowledge with our minds and put that knowledge to practice with our hands, it is our heart that makes it a mission.

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We Do Missions With Our Hands

At some point, the combination of head and heart knowledge leads one to use their own hands and feet to accomplish that which their head and heart have told them is the right thing to do. It very often begins with a few dollars offered in a gift of some kind. Then a person may become active in a simple, local project and he finally sees that he can actually make a real difference in the world. Their contribution goes directly to changing an individual's life and that creates a desire to become even more active in mission work. The nature of each project will vary with each individual. Some people can do nothing but pray

or give of their financial resources. This may be a limitation for them or it may be the best manner in which they can become engaged.

Once a person moves into the mode of actually participating in the changing of another person's life, that person is quite probably more changed than the individual they were helping. Students learn best when they actually put their hands and feet into a project. When a student can physically see, touch, hear, and smell a new paint job on a house or the meal that they just prepared and are getting ready to serve, their learning has just been taken to a new level.

It is important to remember the reason for participating in these types of projects. It is very easy to get sidetracked into the "blessings" of doing such work and not focus on the reason for doing such things. We participate in missions simply because it is what we *should* be doing as representatives of God in Jesus Christ. As members of the kingdom of God, it is simply our everyday responsibility to serve others in the same manner that Christ would serve them.

However, sometimes when we serve others, we tend to look at how we will benefit from the project. We even convince ourselves, our teenagers, our youth committees, and our churches by saying such things as: "it is a GREAT spiritual growth opportunity"; or "our group will grow because of this experience"; or "it makes for good relationships in the community for us to be involved." The reasoning could go on and on. And all of the above statements are very true. There is little denying that a church involved in a positive mission experience will have some potential numerical growth within the youth ministry and be an influence to the community. There is no doubt that a person will experience a giant step forward in their personal, spiritual discipleship when they are able to put their faith into practice. But ALL of these reasons and purposes are the blessings that come from participating in a mission project. They are not the rea-

sons themselves. If these things become the reasons for being involved in missions then the purpose is skewed and a grand deception is taking place for all involved.

The main purpose we should be involved in missions is to bring glory to God and to seek to bring others into God's Kingdom. This can be done through a "direct evangelism" event like street witnessing or crusades. It can also be done through construction projects, Backyard Bible Clubs, or serving meals in homeless shelters. The mission can be accomplished in almost any conceivable method. One method may have immediate results while others may take days, weeks, or even years to provide "visible" results. But, this is where the head, heart, and hand come together for a complete understanding and experience with true purpose and mission.

How to Plan A Mission Experience

Mission experiences are as varied as the persons who participate in them. Finding the right project for your group is vital in order to have a positive experience, especially if it is your youth group's first exposure to "hands-on" missions projects. This does not have to be a difficult task. Here are a few key elements that need to be assessed before choosing your project:

- number of participants (students and leaders)
- skills the participants share and type of ministry desired
- amount of money available to fund the project

Number of participants (Students and Leaders)

It is important to know ahead of time how many folks you anticipate will be participating in the mission project. A project location that needs a group to come and lead a Backyard Bible Club may not need (or want) a group of 25 students and leaders. It is important that your group be well chaperoned for your mission experience. Adult volunteers may need to have "extra" skills in order to utilize them effectively on a mission trip. Adults may need to have certain construction or language skills. It would be good to have an adult who is

familiar with the area to which you are traveling or willing to take an advance (pre-project) trip with you to check out the location.

But, most important, you need to enlist adults who have a heart for working with teenagers as well as a heart for missions. Many project locations will provide the necessary skilled leadership but it is vital that your adults have a working knowledge and understanding of teenagers to ensure that the purpose of the mission remains at the forefront of the students' minds and that they feel comfortable with their leadership.

Skills The Participants Share And Type Of Ministry Desired

You also need to know what different types of skills your group possesses and what they desire to do. It would be difficult for your group to lead a Sports Camp if nobody on your team has any knowledge of sports, the rules, or even the desire to play and teach. If you have a variety of skills available then feel free to do a variety of projects during your mission experience. Maybe you can lead a Vacation Bible School during the morning and then do some construction during the afternoon. This would bring variety to your project as well as challenge those who do not feel skilled in another area. This does not mean that you can't take a group of teenagers with no construction skills to participate in a construction mission project. It may mean, however, that your adult leadership needs to have some construction skills in order to lead the students and it may mean that the construction project be a little easier than building a house from scratch. It is always better to leave a site doing more than you expected than to leave it halfway completed. But remember, the best laid plans for a construction project may be foiled by one day of rain so have a backup plan. Finding a project that fits your skills does not mean you sacrifice a challenge to the group. They must be challenged in order to grow and learn. Choose a project that fits their comfort zone as far as skills are concerned, but is also challenging to them. This will enable them to be stretched

in ways which will move them into a deeper level of level of spiritual maturity and broaden their personal understanding of missions.

Amount Of Money To Fund A Project

“How much is this going to cost?” is not an uncommon question for teens, their parents, the church, and your youth leadership. Nor is it a “faithless” question. It is a question of good stewardship and sensitivity to the abilities (monetarily) of your congregation and your students.

It is best to first determine how much your church is willing to invest in the project and how much each person is willing to pay to participate. This will determine your length of stay, distance traveled, local accommodations and the amount of money you are able to invest in supplies and materials. Your trip could take you across the state for a week and only spend \$50 per person or across the world and spend \$3,000 per person.

How Do I Choose A Project?

Searching for the right mission project may take you through many different organizations and can be very frustrating. For that reason it is wise to begin the search process as early as possible. Many pre-planned projects become filled to capacity soon after they begin accepting reservations. When planning your own project, housing, availability of work, and timing with the host organization are critical. The Virginia Baptist Mission Board is one resource that can serve as a clearinghouse for your mission experience. The choices are as numerous as the locations on this earth and the people who need to be served.

There is no set process that needs to be followed when planning your mission experience. However, you will want to do everything within your power to ensure a good experience. In everything you do remember this one word...*flexibility*. Things will happen that bring about a change in plans. Many of those things are unseen and nearly impossible to predict. How could you predict a homeowner who needed work on their home six months ago

would get another group to do the work two weeks before you arrive? However, many of the things that can happen to bring about change to a mission experience are foreseeable and can be prepared for. If you are planning to hold a Backyard Bible Club in a trailer park for a week or working on an outdoor construction project be prepared for a day of rain. If you are planning to lead a worship service for 100 people and only 15 show up (or vice versa)– be prepared!

While there is no set process for successive mission experiences, I would suggest that you first become involved with a mission project or ongoing experience in your own community. Your next move may be to attend a “pre-planned” project such as *Impact Virginia!*. With these pre-planned projects, your main responsibility is to get your students and adults registered, prepare them for the trip, and then show up. All of the housing, meals, and projects are already lined up for you. This removes the burden of most of the organization from the leader and allows the students to gain a better understanding of being on mission and sharing those feelings with a larger group of people. Many pre-planned projects will have 100-400 participants at each location.

You may want to plan your own mission experience. This requires a great deal more planning and preparation, but it is also a great experience for the organizer and the participants. There is usually much more responsibility laid upon the students such as meal preparation, cleaning, and the leading of devotions, etc. Each experience has benefits that will serve to broaden your groups view and scope of mission and allow them to experience a deeper, spiritual growth. But always remember, these are the “benefits of” not the “purpose for” missions.

Another step that usually requires more planning and a broader view of mission is to take your students farther away from home. This may require more funding, additional resources, and a longer time line for planning, but the long-term benefits gained from this type of mission experience will be well worth the time invest-

ed. Once again, you could plan your own experience or attend a pre-planned mission experience.

Take advantage of connections that might exist right in your own church. Or contact your local Baptist Associational office for other possibilities. Maybe your pastor has a good connection with a homeless shelter in his or her hometown or previous pastorate. There may be church members with connections in a desirable area that could lead to a reduction in costs and better planning and coordination.

Do everything you can to check out the location *before* agreeing to participate. If at all possible, visit the prospective site in person (as mentioned earlier) and ask some other groups who have worked with the organization before for their feedback and impressions from having worked with them in the past. Find out about housing, meals, free times, and schedule. Being able to give a first hand account to parents and students will ease a lot of minds and give comfort to your planning.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that missions is a lot of hard work and coordination. Many times it all falls through in the end and there are even times when the experience is not a good one. If everything goes well with a mission project, we may tend to take the credit for ourselves, but we need to be constantly reminded of the real purpose and reason for our mission. All the glory goes to God and it is for God that we become engaged in missions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What is the difference in being missions involved and missions engaged?
- What are the 3 main areas of mission engagement?
- Which area of mission engagement, if any, is more important than the others? Why or why not?
- How have you, your church, and your group been involved/engaged in missions in the past?
- Given the nature of your particular group, which avenue of missions engage-

ment do you feel you should follow? Why?

MISSION AGENCY CONTACT LIST

The following Baptist organizations can provide “pre-planned” mission experiences, mission resources, and project locations.

- Virginia Baptist Mission Board
Offering statewide, national, international, pre-planned, group, individual
800-255-2428 – Dean Miller
deanmiller@vbmb.org
www.vbmb.org
- North American Mission Board
Offering national, group, individual
800-462-8657
www.studentz.com
- International Mission Board
Offering international, group, individual
800-999-2889
www.thetask.org
- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Offering national, international, group, individual
770 220-1600
www.cbfonline.org
- Woman’s Missionary Union of Virginia
Offering statewide, national, international, pre-planned, group, individual
800-255-2428
www.wmu-va.org

Other mission organizations

- PASSPORT 800-769-0210
www.passportcamps.org
- Youth On Mission
www.yom.org
- Youth With A Mission
www.ywam.org
- The U.S. Center for World Mission
www.uscwm.org
- Group Workcamps
www.groupworkcamps.org

Books For Further Study

- Borthwick, Paul. *Youth and Missions*. USA: SP Publications, 1988
- Nash, Robert, Jr. *An 8-Track Church In A CD World*. Macon, Georgia: Smith & Helwys, 1997
- Engel, James F. and William A. Dyrness. *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000

MISSION TRIP CHECKLIST

If you are seeking to plan your own mission project or event this checklist may help you. It is intended to serve as a guide in your planning. Remember, by choosing an established organization that sponsors mission projects many of these steps are already completed for you. However, it is helpful to know all of the steps so that you may be prepared to offer a well rounded mission experience for your teens.

LOCAL			
Planning stage	# of weeks before project		
Survey the community to discover needs and possibilities	24	Contact project host	35
Contact local agencies that may be able to provide support	20	Seek appropriate budget monies	32
Coordinate the project through your Youth Leadership Team	18	Set participant fee	30
Determine the specific project	16	Secure adequate adult leadership	30
Visit the project location	14	Establish participant requirements (application forms, age, previous experience, etc.)	30
Enlist youth for project	12	First Fundraiser	24
Arrange for appropriate adult leadership	12	Collect deposit for trip	24
Reconfirm arrangements with agencies	10	Make a pre-project visit to the site	20
Secure necessary transportation and meals	6	Plan a daily schedule	18
Provide training for participants	4	Give parents information packet	16
Gather necessary materials	2	Begin Training (continue as necessary)	14
Send appropriate follow up letters	-1	Reconfirm all reservations	12
		Gather necessary materials and supplies	10
		Hold a parent/youth information meeting	9
		Second Fundraiser	6
		Collect balance of trip	4
		Secure all necessary paperwork (medical forms, permission forms, etc)	4
		Begin packing	2
		(project materials, medical supplies, food, etc.)	
		Report back to church	-1
		Send appropriate follow-up letters	-1

NATIONAL and INTERNATIONAL			
Planning stage	# of weeks before project		
Coordinate the project through your Youth Leadership Team	40		
Choose a location (see the contact list for possibilities)	36		
Secure local arrangements – if necessary (housing, meals, local transportation)	35		

MISSION PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

You may want to consider asking the following questions of youth and adults who are interested in becoming involved in a mission project. You may allow your entire group to participate in local projects but national and international projects need people with a bit more experience or maturity.

Name _____

Age _____

Project you are requesting _____

Please answer the following questions:

In what ways have you been involved with missions in the past?

What skills do you feel you possess that will add to the mission team?

What are your weaknesses?

What do you think is the “goal” of this mission project?

Explain your feelings about “cultural diversity”.

Why do you want to participate in this project?

On a separate page please share your testimony.

How do you plan to pay for this mission experience?