

Short-Term Mission: Planning and Criteria

Christ Church Virginia Water Mission Team

The following is not an exhaustive document, nor a policy on short term mission (STM). Rather it provides thoughts for consideration when a STM is being considered, and gives an idea of the issues the mission team will consider when reviewing an application for support.

We are aware of the depth of responsibility we have if we are to send out an individual or a team for a short term mission trip. Our hope is that the following questions and considerations would be of benefit in clarifying the purpose of a trip, and determining how it will run.

For the purposes of this document we define “Mission” as the sharing of the Gospel, the maturing of disciples and the teaching of Christian leaders (with or without a component of social justice) and “short term mission” to mean cross-cultural mission for a period of 6 months or less.

Questions to consider:

1. How does the proposed trip benefit mission work?

It is taken as read that in most cases most of the benefit from a STM trip will be to those going. However STM *can* provide benefits to those in the field:

- Help in building long term relationships between those on the field, those being served, and the church back home.
- Encouragement to long term workers / the local church in the field
- Extra manpower (perhaps for a camp, event, mission week, project)
- Providing training for the local church in an area of Christian ministry where they ask for the training

2. How will it benefit those going?

We need to be aware of, rather than embarrassed by, the fact that much of the benefit will be felt by those going. Christian maturity will be developed and as a consequence of that much additional good can be seen back home. Growth tends to occur in the following ways:

- Reliance on God. STM takes Christians out of their comfort zone and helps give a more global perspective both of the church and the gospel need.
- Humility – to spend time with people who don’t know where their next meal comes from and yet have real joy in God, is humbling. STM challenges individuals as they see how other Christians live, struggle, demonstrate their faith in God and worship.
- Observing Evangelism and Discipleship cross culturally can spark greater motivation at home.

- Perhaps one of the most significant benefits is to give people a taste of mission or a country that might spark their interest to go back longer term. Think through who you invite to join the team, including some who might be suitable for or thinking about longer-term commitment.

Dangers in short term mission

Although there is the potential for huge benefit in short-term missions both for those going and for those receiving. However, there is great danger for harm rather than good being done, particularly to those receiving the team from the UK. Above all, it's important not to trample the poor just so your church can get more engaged in mission.

A golden rule is to avoid paternalism (thinking we are superior and have the solution) and avoid doing what local people can do for themselves. This undermines local effort leading to feelings of inferiority for them. As a minimum, short term mission needs to be seen as an extension of what is being done locally through the church.

Another major pitfall involves applying "relief" or "aid" when what is needed is "development" (fixing the cause of the problem).

We need to understand different cultural mindsets. Getting a project completed in 2 weeks might be our objective and we'll doubtless think we've made great relationships along the way. For local people however, these relationships will likely seem superficial. For them, relationships are much more important than getting the project finished in 2 weeks and take time to develop. If we get this wrong we risk feeling local people are lazy. Development is a long term process not a 2 week product. We should go to "be", not to "do". In fact we should never go to "do" what the local church can do for themselves, because that has the risk of local Christians not taking ownership of the project. However instances where we can provide a skill that the local church itself does not have and can provide advice and input that will enable them to complete the project more effectively, will be much more valuable and appreciated.

We should adopt an asset-based approach rather than a needs-based approach ie "what does this community have?" as opposed to "what doesn't this community have?" Adopting a needs-based approach tends to undermine the local community and result in damage rather than development.

The receiving church should invite the team (rather than the team inviting themselves) and the receiving church should determine what needs doing and how it's done. Many hosts would rather just have the money and have you stay at home. This is a bigger pitfall than you might imagine. People without power are very conscious they don't have power whilst those of us in positions of power rarely think about it. This can result in the receiving church feeling they have to "receive" you when in fact they'd rather you just sent the money.

STM is probably one of the least 'effective' ways of doing mission! Generally speaking the real work is done in long-term work and building long term relationships. As much as possible our emphasis should be on mission that best enables that.

Finally, we need to bear in mind that we although we are called to be Jesus' witnesses "in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria **and** the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) by definition it's more difficult to witness cross-culturally than to those in our own communities. Those who desire to go on a

cross-cultural mission trip should also have a passion for local mission.

A couple of salutary (real life) examples:

1. Harm to the ministry of the local church in the field – local people stopped attending Sunday school at the church after the team from the developed world left because the local church workers didn't have the glitzy craft materials the short term team brought.
2. Harm to the short term team members – After the 3rd year of short term mission giving Christmas presents to the poor the team concluded it was a waste of time because they never saw any fathers around bothering to look after their families. In reality the fathers stayed away when the team visited because they were ashamed of their inability to provide for their families.

Expectations for team members

As a rule we would expect:

- Team members to be committed Christians who are living out their faith at home
- Submission to training and reading prior to the trip Eg the book “When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor. . . and Ourselves” by Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert
- Significant financial contribution from each team member (in accordance with their means)
- A willingness to work under authority and as part of a team
- A willingness to work under the guidance and direction of the local church / receiving ministry
- A genuine commitment to pray for the work and the individuals being served.

How might we decide on the mission / country / organisation?

Where we have literally a world of possibilities, how might we decide where to serve? The trip needs to be driven by those working on the field. Helpful questions to ask might be:

- Where do we already have contacts? Do we have links via mission partners, or those who have gone out from Christ Church to work or serve around the world?
- Is the work in conjunction with and led by a mission agency or mission partner experienced in cross cultural mission? This should be a requirement for any trip.
- Which mission partners might be helped or encouraged? Are there some who are isolated and would appreciate personal support?

Next step

If you are interested in considering further the possibility of going on or running a short term mission please contact a member of the mission team.

Attached is a copy of the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission, which we recommend should be read by anyone considering short-term (or even long-term mission).

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Micah Declaration on Integral Mission - An Introduction

The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission was developed by participants in the Micah Network's consultation on Integral Mission held at Oxford in September 2001. The participants in the consultation - 140 theologians, church leaders and relief and development workers from around the world - also contributed to an excellent book that captures more of the thought and experience underlying the Declaration. [Also see the book, "Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral Mission and the Poor", edited by Tim Chester.] This Declaration has subsequently been endorsed by over 250 Christian agencies, denominations and fellowships worldwide, including the World Evangelical Alliance and the National Association of Evangelicals (USA).

Micah Declaration on Integral Mission (2001)

Integral Mission

Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.

We call one another back to the centrality of Jesus Christ. His life of sacrificial service is the pattern for Christian discipleship. In his life and through his death Jesus modelled identification with the poor and inclusion of the other. On the cross God shows us how seriously he takes justice, reconciling both rich and poor to himself as he meets the demands of his justice. We serve by the power of the risen Lord through the Spirit as we journey with the poor, finding our hope in the subjection of all things under Christ and the final defeat of evil. We confess that all too often we have failed to live a life worthy of this gospel.

The grace of God is the heartbeat of integral mission. As recipients of undeserved love we are to show grace, generosity and inclusiveness. Grace redefines justice as not merely honouring a contract, but helping the disadvantaged.

Integral Mission with the Poor and Marginalized

The poor like everyone else bear the image of the Creator. They have knowledge, abilities and resources. Treating the poor with respect means enabling the poor to be the architects of change in their communities rather than imposing solutions upon them. Working with the poor involves building relationships that lead to mutual change.

We welcome welfare activities as important in serving with the poor. Welfare activities, however, must be extended to include movement towards values transformation, the empowerment of communities and co-operation in wider issues of justice. Because of its presence among the poor, the church is in a unique position to restore their God-given dignity

by enabling them to produce their own resources and to create solidarity networks.

We object to any use of the word ‘development’ that implies some countries are civilised and developed while others are uncivilised and underdeveloped. This imposes a narrow and linear economic model of development and fails to recognise the need for transformation in so-called ‘developed’ countries. While we recognise the value of planning, organization, evaluation and other such tools, we believe they must be subservient to the process of building relationships, changing values and empowering the poor.

Work with the poor involves setbacks, opposition and suffering. But we have also been inspired and encouraged by stories of change. In the midst of hopelessness we have hope.

Integral Mission and the Church

God by his grace has given local churches the task of integral mission. The future of integral mission is in planting and enabling local churches to transform the communities of which they are part. Churches as caring and inclusive communities are at the heart of what it means to do integral mission. People are often attracted to the Christian community before they are attracted to the Christian message.

Our experience of walking with poor communities challenges our concept of what it means to be church. The church is not merely an institution or organisation, but communities of Jesus that embody the values of the kingdom. The involvement of the poor in the life of the church is forcing us to find new ways of being church within the context of our cultures instead of being mere reflections of the values of one dominant culture or sub-culture. Our message has credibility to the extent that we adopt an incarnational approach. We confess that too often the church has pursued wealth, success, status and influence. But the kingdom of God has been given to the community that Jesus Christ called his little flock.

We do not want our church traditions to hinder working together for the sake of the kingdom. We need one another. The church can best address poverty by working with the poor and other stakeholders like civil society, government and the private sector with mutual respect and a recognition of the distinctive role of each partner. We offer the Micah Network as one opportunity for collaboration for the sake of the poor and the gospel.

Integral Mission and Advocacy

We confess that in a world of conflict and ethnic tension we have often failed to build bridges. We are called to work for reconciliation between ethnically divided communities, between rich and poor, between the oppressors and the oppressed.

We acknowledge the command to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute in a world that has given ‘money rights’ greater priority than human rights. We recognise the need for advocacy both to address structural injustice and to rescue needy neighbours.

Globalisation is often in reality the dominance of cultures that have the power to project their goods, technologies and images far beyond their borders. In the face of this, the church in its rich diversity has a unique role as a truly global community. We exhort Christians to network and co-operate to face together the challenges of globalisation. The church needs a unified

global voice to respond to the damage caused by it to both human beings and the environment. Our hope for the Micah Network is that it will foster a movement of resistance to a global system of exploitation.

We affirm that the struggle against injustice is spiritual. We commit ourselves to prayer, advocating on behalf of the poor not only before the rulers of this world, but also before the Judge of all nations.

Integral Mission and Lifestyle

Integral mission is the concern of every Christian. We want to see the poor through the eyes of Jesus who, as he looked on the crowds, had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

There is a need for integral discipleship involving the responsible and sustainable use of the resources of God's creation and the transformation of the moral, intellectual, economic, cultural and political dimensions of our lives. For many of us this includes recovering a biblical sense of stewardship. The concept of Sabbath reminds us that there should be limits to our consumption. Wealthy Christians – both in the West and in the Two-Thirds World – must use their wealth in the service of others. We are committed to the liberation of the rich from slavery to money and power. The hope of treasure in heaven releases us from the tyranny of mammon.

Our prayer is that in our day and in our different contexts we may be able to do what the Lord requires of us: to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

27 September 2001