



Preparing Teams/Groups for Short Term Mission Serving Opportunities

Welcome to the growing family of those who have served with CALMS on a short term mission opportunity. Each team is unique and each team member brings unique gifts to the team the team they serve with.

Your short term mission experience will undoubtedly alter your view of God and of the world. This might be referred to as a “game changer” in your faith walk. We pray that the following thoughts (and suggested activities) will help you as you prepare for your short term mission opportunity.

Note: This resource is designed to be used (by you) within the context of your team or group. It will be most useful if all of your team members are familiar with this resource and then work together to utilize those parts that will help in your preparation. We don’t intend to replace anything your church or ministry leaders have provided – but trust that what is here will complement your other preparations.

Components/Cultures/Expectations

There are really two components (maybe even three) to your short-term mission experience. The first is how you and your team prepare; the second is what happens when you return. Sandwiched in between is the actual experience while in your host country.

You should also recognize that you will be adjusting to two cultures. The first (and more obvious) is the culture you will be visiting – the other is the sub-culture of your team.

Understanding (and clarifying) in advance what your personal expectations are, as well as those of your team, will be important for the “go” aspect of your experience, but also be especially helpful as you “return.”

The following may be helpful in all three areas.

Forming a Team/Intersecting lives

A good way to get started is with some team building exercises (might be months out from your travel dates).

Choose from the following exercises – or do them all. . .



Questions that help prepare for a cross-cultural experience

1. How do you typically respond to conflict?
 - Peacemaker: I turn the other cheek
 - Warrior: I fight back
 - Diplomat: I negotiate an acceptable compromise
 - Calvary: I look for a way around it
 - Artillery: I take shots from a distance
 - Special forces: I try to preempt a strike
 - Other: _____

2. When you are experiencing something uncomfortable how are you most likely to react?
 - Hide how I feel and act like everything is fine
 - Tell anyone who will listen
 - Seek out a trusted friend to help me deal with the situation
 - Reveal bits and pieces but never admit all I'm going through
 - Get away from others and spend some quiet time talking to God
 - Other: _____

3. What are your earliest recollections of God? Who introduced you to God/Jesus?
How likely are you to talk to someone else about God?
 - Very likely
 - Somewhat likely
 - Likely
 - Probably not
 - Why did you answer the way you did? _____

4. What is the farthest you have ever traveled? Where did you go and why?
 - Complete this sentence – I know a person who lives in _____.
(The city/state/or country should reflect a different culture than your typical environment.)

Fruits of the Spirit –

- Write down the fruit of the spirit. You'll find a complete list in Galatians 5:22-23. As a group, brainstorm some everyday exercises that might develop that characteristic in your own life. Then ask someone in the group to create hypothetical situations where you would need to practice that particular fruit. You may choose to work on more than one. Just make sure that at each team building time you take time to share with the group what you are experiencing as you focus on that fruit of the spirit. As the



time of departure nears – choose a new fruit – one that you will practice applying throughout the short term experience.

Establishing a Team Covenant

CALMS encourages all teams to create a covenant. Here are a few thoughts about covenants – and some suggested components of a covenant.

- What they are/aren't – Covenants help teams live together. When issues arise, team members can refer to the covenant – issues can be resolved around a piece of paper –not around another person.
- Building One – Use one of your pre-trip gatherings to build your team/group covenant. Be prepared to revisit the covenant once you have arrived in your host country. Since covenants are typically quite practical – it isn't possible to know all the “practicals” until arriving in your host country. Thus, revisiting your covenant may be very appropriate.
- Keeping One – A successful covenant is kept by all and agreed upon by all. It takes time to establish – but if this step is taken – everyone feels safer more able to be part of solutions – rather than part of a problem.

Suggested components of a Short Term Mission Team Group Covenant

- Identify the expectations of the team as a whole
- Identify how physical needs like food, water, transportation will be handled
- Include a plan for emergencies
- How decisions will be handled when it isn't possible for a group decision
- How will the team say focused on teamwork rather than individual achievement
- Length of time for debriefing each day/night. Some things to consider: How debriefing will be accomplished? In other words, what format? Reports; first person account; from notes; free flow; each one length of time.
- Where debriefing will occur? Sitting around in a circle, or at a table may not work for everyone. Vary the environment, the routine. What about an activity while you debrief? Who leads?
- How and how often will the group/team communicate with those back at home? Will there be a team photographer? Will someone be taking a computer?
- Cover as many details as you believe will help your team have the very best experience.



Additional Growth Opportunities for Individuals and Team Members

Wrapping Your Mind around Poverty and Disenfranchisement?

A big part of what happens while a team is on site is frequently related to a first time awareness of the inequities that exist in the world. This is when it is easy to point fingers and blame the government, the missionary (if there are missionaries), the local church leaders, or even to blame those who are being served.

A great book, based on a real story, and set here in America, that is worth the read is called: *“same kind of different as me”* by Ron Hall and Denver Moore. It’s a paperback from Thomas Nelson. Have your entire group read it – and spend one evening just processing reactions. The book helps to understand U.S. poverty and disenfranchisement. A helpful way to begin the conversation about the poverty you will encounter.

Concerning the Work or Ministry to be Accomplished

The questions speak for themselves:

- Does the team know what is expected of them?
- Have they been adequately prepared for the ministry or work they will do?
- Do they have the skills needed for the physical tasks that lie ahead?
- Will they have adequate supplies with them when they go?
- What attention has been paid to being culturally sensitive?
- Things may be culturally different but not wrong
- Has the team been briefed on things that can be difficult – such as food, hygiene or health care?

Arrival – Connecting with local partners

The first day/evening that you arrive in your host country is not too early to begin processing what you are experiencing. The following way might be a great way to begin the process. Keep the conversation going and growing --

- Place large sheets of paper around the room (either on wall or on tables). On the sheets write headings like: Poverty, Role of Women, Role of Children, Food customs, Dress codes, Lack or privacy, Visible evidences of the church.
- Each group member should write down something that they have noticed (in one of those categories) in their short time in country. After everyone has had a chance to write down a specific example, begin to talk about ways that your particular team might be able to address that need. Allow



group/team members to talk about their feelings as they realize that as those who come to serve they will encounter situations that they can't "fix." This might lead to some healthy discussion about appropriate response to needs they will encounter.

- CALMS encourages teams to always ask this question: "What is the unintended consequence to the action that I am about to take?"
- Those you serve will best be served if they have an opportunity to see how they can also give – and not just receive.

God Sightings – Keeping Perspective

Many times team members experience a sense of hopelessness and get off track because of that. (Satan can use that to keep a team from being all that they can be.) The following exercise helps participants to see through different lenses.)

- Group members keep a log (each day) of "God-sightings" – where did they experience God – either among the group interaction, or among the people they are serving, or perhaps just by observing something in the culture.
- Use those "sightings" to encourage one another at the end of every day.

The Four Tensions

Sometimes the fatigue of the day may create a sense that the debrief time can be skipped. Don't do that. If everyone is too tired one evening – then get up earlier in the a.m. and debrief before heading out for the day. The overall effectiveness of the entire trip will be enriched by attending to this detail.

Whatever other components you include in your daily debrief, we strongly encourage that you include a discussion regarding The Four Tensions.

- Challenge of Time – Teams may be much more concerned about time because they feel they have to complete an assignment. Each group member should share an example related to time.
- Challenge of Relationships – Teams typically are focused on getting a task done and tend to overlook the aspect of building relationships. Teams have a tendency to become project focused when they aren't sure how to react or interact with the people around them. Again – talk about this at each debriefing time.
- Challenge of Vulnerability – Teams are frequently made up of people who are very good at what they do. Suddenly they find themselves in



an “over my head” position. This frequently leads to challenges to the way that local leadership has set up something – and challenges between members of the team because they each feel they “know what is best.” This is common to all teams – so teams should talk about it in advance and be vulnerable enough to admit (at each debriefing) when they felt a need to protect their own way of doing things at all costs. This can be a really powerful time as a team debriefs.

- Challenge of Communication – We each have unique combinations of experience and cultural backgrounds that influence our perception of reality. We misinterpret and misunderstand each other all the time, even when we share many values, attitudes, beliefs, and ways of doing, being and thinking. Imagine how easily communication can break down when just one of these elements is missing. No Christian witness can hope to communicate the Gospel if communication is disrupted. Being willing to be vulnerable and “ASK” when you don’t understand is so important. Then keep a log of what you learn along the way and share those findings with others during the debrief time.

A healthy discussion of these four tensions will keep the team aware that what they are experiencing is normal. And it is something experienced over and over by those who live and work in a second culture.

Expectations for Each Day

Much frustration can be prevented by developing in advance a list of expected activities for each day. HOWEVER – it is important to review every evening and make sure that each team member is aware of what to expect the next day. Frequently plans change because a certain building material is not available, or proper notification of locals prevents a VBS from beginning on the original day. If team members are included each evening (or before heading out in the morning) in a review of what to expect – and of changes that impact the schedule for that day – they have a greater sense of ownership. Ownership always makes for a positive spirit – and that’s always welcome in serve opportunities that may be challenging.

Many times you will be asked to be part of a final day/night celebration. This might be the dedication of homes that you helped to construct, a final activity for a vacation Bible school, or an evening meal with members of your host team.

Once your local hosts are aware of any such plans, they will communicate those to you. Members of your team may then wish to personalize the event with a special presentation, song, or addition to a meal.



Don't Depend on Your Memory

CALMS recommends that every participant purchase a small – pocket size – journal. Throughout the day, even at work sites, there will be times when a comment, a piece of information, the name of someone, a prayer request that you received, et cetera, will be something that you will want to keep.

This is a great asset when you have returned home – especially if you date your notes/comments.

A Few Ideas for Your Final Debrief While in Your Host Country

You might consider using a fill in the blank – since for many, this last evening together can be quite emotional.

- My experience here has been
- The people I will miss are
- The things I will miss are
- The easiest part of leaving will be
- The most stressful part of leaving will be
- I feel that my goals and experiences have been
- I feel that the goals of my teams have been

And Home You Will Return

In the excitement of going – and the excitement of the actual time you are in a host country – it's easy to lose sight of the importance of what happens when you get back home. As a team you will have intentionally build in time for daily debriefing. Your home congregation or sending agency should intentionally plan for a time of debriefing upon your return.

Why is this important? Without attention to adequate preparation to go, AND re-entry preparation, it is easy for the short term experience to fizzle out with minimal impact on the participant and members of the sending church or agency. Without a time to process or debrief it may be difficult for the short term participant to chart a new course that would involve significant ongoing spiritual growth.

THE "ONE ANOTHER" COMMANDS IN THE BIBLE (N.I.V.)

(The following "one anothers" of the Bible can be helpful as you prepare to reflect Christ to your team and to those in your host country.)



- *John 13:14 - If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.*
- *John 13:34 - A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*
- *John 13:35 - By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*
- *John 15:12 - This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.*
- *Romans 12:10 - Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;*
- *Romans 12:16 - Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.*
- *Romans 14:13 - Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.*
- *Romans 14:19 - So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.*
- *Romans 15:5 - Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,*
- *Romans 15:7 - Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.*
- *Romans 15:14 - And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.*
- *Galatians 6:2 - Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.*
- *Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*
- *Ephesians 5:19 - speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;*
- *Philippians 2:3 - Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;*
- *1 Thessalonians 3:12 - and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;*
- *1 Thessalonians 4:9 - Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;*
- *1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*
- *1 Thessalonians 5:13b - Live in peace with one another.*
- *2 Thessalonians 1:3 - We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;*
- *Hebrews 3:13 - But encourage one another day after day,*
- *Hebrews 10:24 - and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,*



- *1 Peter 4:8 - Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.*
- *1 Peter 4:9 - Be hospitable to one another without complaint.*
- *1 Peter 4:10 - As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*
- *1 John 4:7 - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

CALMS would love to hear from you about this resource. Please send any thoughts/suggestions/comments to: Dawn at calmslogistics@calms.org.

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