



"Connecting and Advancing Leaders in Mission and Service...to Win the Lost for Christ"

**February 2009 E-Letter**

## **“The Paradox of Discipleship”**

What’s the connection between short-term mission experiences and increased spiritual maturity? It’s not unusual for those returning from short-term mission service to refer to their experience as “spiritual growth on steroids.”

As I have talked with pastors from all across America who have sent their members on a short-term mission trip, I have heard them say, “I’m eager to have my people participate in short-term service since it seems to over and over again that they want to see their members grow in discipleship and spiritual maturity. “Somehow,” they say, “Short-term mission service seems to speed up the discipleship process.”

No one can explain exactly what happens – but we do know that serving as a member of a short-term team builds awareness and patience, forces people to listen to each other and to their hosts, teaches patience and makes people feel more vulnerable and therefore more ready to receive what God has to offer.

Most Americans feel somewhat in control of their lives in their own community where everything is predictable and familiar. Participating in a short-term experience in a

different country without knowing the language often forces individuals to depend on God and seek his help along the way.

Participants often report that they are able to see God at work in ways that they have not always seen before, and that they are more motivated to pray for guidance and direction.

It seems also that what happens along the way –preparing, getting to a mission location, working together on a common project with others, living together with seven or eight other people, and responding to new challenges, calls for change in people– change that others can often see.

It's reminiscent of the New Testament church – where the change in the lives of the new Christians was so evident that others wanted the same thing--“and daily the Lord added to the number of those being saved.” These pastors have seen how sending their members to use their gifts and help others is an effective way for them to grow and develop as more mature disciples of Jesus. They (Acts 2: 47) observe that serving others in a cross-cultural setting stretches their people, builds awareness and patience, develops listening and witnessing skills, and speeds up the spiritual maturity process.

In my own life and work as a missionary pastor, I have observed many times how getting involved in the lives of others has helped me grow as a person and deal with some of the rough edges of my life.

While counseling others, I'd reflect on my own relationships with wife and children; after a difficult meeting, I'd make sure to do something for someone less fortunate. I began to notice that blessings came about through serving – and that frequently eclipsed what I thought was the most important thing to do be doing.

As my focus shifted I was able These experiences caused me to reflect on the fact that my involvement in other people's lives was God's way of meeting needs in the body of Christ, and it was also God's way of helping me mature in my own faith.

While working on a Bible study about the Great Commission a few years ago, I had this insight: I realized that God could very easily have accomplished his mission without us, but he wants us to be involved and invites us to “make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:18-20) And why does he want us to be involved in his mission? I believe it is for two reasons:

One reason has to do with the fact that God likes to use means like the means of Grace to accomplish his work. And we his Baptized children are his “means of the Means of Grace.” We are the means by which he chooses to communicate his Word. As we demonstrate his love through concrete actions and proclaim his love in Jesus Christ through concrete and appropriate words, we become channels for God's grace, mercy and forgiveness. And a channel never remains the same – it is changed by whatever passes through.

The second reason why God involves us in his mission, I believe, has to do with us. He could accomplish his mission without us of course, but he knows that our involvement in sharing the Good News with others will help us grow in our faith and develop as mature Christians. In effect, our involvement in God’s mission and ministry work—including our involvement in short-term mission work—is God’s strategy for growing his kingdom and growing his kingdom people!

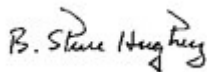
This brings us to the explanation of the “paradox of discipleship” noted in the title of this message. *The paradox of discipleship is that we mature in our faith as Christians as we serve and share our faith.* I believe it is God’s plan to fulfill his Great Commission through us and I also believe it is God’s plan to help us grow up as his disciples by our involvement in his mission.

*A second paradox of discipleship is that the source of our fulfillment and true significance is to give our lives away in service and mission.* That’s why we like to say that the other meaning of CALMS is “Connecting and Advancing Leaders in Mission and Service!”

As CALMS connects congregations and individual Christian leaders to mission and service opportunities in Central America, God gets two things done: He changes us – and he changes others. He reaches out with his love through us to lost and hurting people, and he grows us, his children, into more mature disciples who speak and act more like Jesus.

Our involvement in God’s mission, including our involvement in short-term mission work is God’s strategy to grow his kingdom and to grow his kingdom people!

Your brother in God’s mission and fellow traveler on the spiritual journey!



Pastor Steve Hughey  
CALMS Executive Director



*CALMS’ Executive Director, Pastor Steve Hughey, (kneeling) with a short-term mission team and Guatemalan partners, helped build a new house for a single mother in Zacapa,*

*Guatemala. In this picture he poses with the family and some of the Guatemalan partners who worked on the project.*

## **University Students from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, Partner with Panama Congregations**

An energetic and well-prepared CALMS team from Peace Lutheran Campus Center in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, worked with partners from five separate Lutheran congregations in Panama to reach out to children in their communities with the Gospel. Pastor Carl Selle and his wife, Karol, led the group of 17 university students and helped them work successfully as partners with their Panamanian co-workers.

The group split up into separate smaller teams to work with leaders of the five Panama congregations during their visit from January 1 through 12, 2009. In all 200 children were reached in Loma Cova, 35 at Balboa, 80 at Rio Rita, 31 in Sabanitas and 40 at Los Andes.

Carl Selle, campus pastor at Peace Lutheran for 14 years, has led more than 20 teams in previous years including three with CALMS. These mission trips help university students develop meaningful cross-cultural understanding, grow in discipleship, and experience significant sharing of their Christian faith. An important part of their work in Panama was to build relationships with their Panamanian partners, encourage the congregations during their VBS outreach week, and equip young Panamanian leaders to teach and lead more effectively.

Here are a few samples from the students' journals about how the experience impacted their lives:

“All of the people here have influenced my life for the better. Everyone here is so loving and caring. Every morning I look forward to going downstairs and being greeted by countless children who are all so excited that we are here with them.” Kally

“Today made me realize that missionary work isn't just about the people you are helping, but it's about how it changes you even more.” Michelle

“I have been humbled by God and by these team members to not become complacent and to expect something new—whatever the new happens to be.” Mike



**Left:** Members of Peace Lutheran Campus Center (Stevens Point, Wisconsin) served with Panamanian Lutherans to lead a group of children in worship during one of their five separate VBS programs in Panama, January 1-12, 2009.

**Right:** Members of the short-term mission team from Peace Lutheran Campus Center led children in outdoor activities at Redeemer, Balboa in Panama during their mission outreach.

## Pray For Us...

Thank God for the leadership of Pastor Carl Sell and his wife Karol and for the wonderful work that his team of 17 university students were able to do in Panama in early January. Thank God for how he helped these students grow in their own faith while serving with fellow Christians in Panama.

Pray for a team of 17 individuals from First Immanuel Lutheran Church in Cedarburg, Wisconsin as they serve in Guatemala. Ask the Holy Spirit to give them wisdom and protection as they build two homes and repair a third home in Gualan and provide medical services for needy people who suffered in last July's devastating mud-slide that destroyed the homes of over 3,500 people in the mountain town of La Union.

Pray for a team of seminary students from Concordia Seminary going with CALMS' on a mission exposure trip to serve and learn in Belize. Ask God to help these students to "shine like stars" as they "hold out the word of life." (Philippians 2:15)

Ask God to bless the upcoming February partnership meeting in the Dominican Republic for the various partner agencies who help guide and support the new Lutheran mission in that country. Pray especially for Pastor Ted Krey and his wife, Rebecca as they settle in to their new life and develop relationships with the other missionaries and national workers.

Pray that God will lead more short-term medical mission teams to sign up to serve with CALMS and Dr. Elry Orozco at the Holy Cross Clinic in Lake Amatitlan, Guatemala. (Note for more information on this program, contact CALMS at [calms@calms.org](mailto:calms@calms.org) or call 314-640-4830).