

Sanity-Saving Tips for Your Next Mission Trip

Written by Byron Townsend

Do you remember the mission trip you took just a few months ago? Well, believe it or not, it's time to begin planning the next experience. The good news is that the stress and headaches can be relieved with some basic planning strategies offered by MissionLab, a ministry of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary:



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1. Bathe every decision and detail in prayer.

So many times we simply rely upon our own logic to accomplish tasks. God is a God of detail. Allow Him the opportunity to provide and lead the way not only on the big decisions, but even in the small details. This is an excellent way to ensure that God receives the glory with every aspect of your mission experience.

2. Discern where God's Spirit is leading you and your students to build His Kingdom.

The mission project location and type of ministry that your students involve themselves in is vital to the overall health of the mission experience. Student leaders must seek Holy Spirit guidance in determining a mission location that matches the experience of the students. The capacity of ministry in which the students serve must also correspond with their abilities, needs and present journey with Jesus.

3. Set goals.

Answer these key questions about your trip:

- What is the major goal of our mission trip?
- What does God want to accomplish in and through us?

4. Keep other obligations and activities in mind when selecting dates for the trip.

When you plan the date for your missions experience, try to schedule around as many extracurricular activities as possible (summer softball and baseball leagues, band camps, swim team or JROTC drills, for example). Take as many students as possible! Potential for tremendous life change is embodied in each mission experience. Even the students who seem unreachable are in a climate where the power of Christ can transform.

5. Locate potential mission project sites.

You can use the resources of the North American Mission Board, International Mission Board, Woman's Missionary Union or an associational office to find mission project sites. Once you have a list, you can find one that will correlate with the type of work that God has led you and your students to do.

6. Initiate and develop a relationship with the contact at each project site.

The contact person at the mission project site is one of the most important people involved with your mission experience planning. He or she will be able to inform you of potential ministry opportunities and should be able to offer an orientation on the culture, neighborhood and effective methods of ministry. Be sure that the contact person is one who is reliable!

7. Work out all of the "eats and sleeps" logistics.

Where will the students eat and sleep? Some student leaders are attracted to the gym floors and family life centers because of the low cost. If this is the route you follow, keep in mind that you and your students will be physically exhausted at the end of the day. If the mission experience is short term (one to two nights), a sleeping bag on the gym floor and some fast food and spaghetti may be acceptable. If the mission trip is more extensive and the mission work includes physical labor, the students and adult sponsors need to have a good night's rest in a bed of some sort. If your group's sleeping and eating habits are poor, your group's ministry will be poor. Trying to save a few dollars is not an excuse for poor ministry.

8. Coordinate all necessary transportation.

This includes transportation to and around the mission city. Do you have a church van or bus? Will you rent vans there, or will you rent them in your hometown and drive? Make sure your wheels are taken care of and that you have insurance covered.

9. Plan how free time will be spent.

Are there any local places your students might like to visit? Is there some space that your group can relax in and spend time with God in private or corporate worship? Many times, your local contact will have some information for you, or you can contact chambers of commerce for ideas.

10. Plan your costs.

This one's important to the parents! Be sure to include all costs necessary when giving details of the trip. Ask the church about possibly using an existing missions fund to help with expenses. Offer to provide scholarships for needy students. Although money is a necessity in planning a mission experience, remember that our God is a God of detail and is not bound by finances!

11. Promote your mission trip.

Keep your church informed as you work through the planning. The congregation is a tremendous resource of prayer! Enroll prayer warriors to pray for specific students during the mission experience (For example, senior adults are waiting to hear how they can be involved with the student ministry!).

Byron Townsend serves as the MissionLab Associate Director for Students & College.

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Elements Involved in Successful Mission Experiences

Written by John Bailey

Mission trips are quickly becoming a staple of churches and youth programs all over the United States. In the past year alone, more than 20,000 participants have been involved in doing their own mission trips, resulting in more than 4,000 recorded professions of faith. The astounding numbers are only the tip of the iceberg. Other church groups have done great mission work but have not reported their involvement. Both the numerical data and the amazing stories from the field have pointed to one thing: We are daily advancing toward fulfilling the Great Commission, and God is using mission trips - and your youth - to get us there.



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So why else are mission trips so successful in putting youth and others on mission for Christ? As I've tracked the student groups who have served over the past few years through the North American Mission Board, I have noticed definite components in how churches are doing their mission trips - elements that work.

Elements Involved in Successful Mission Experiences

Make sure there is a clearly defined need to be met

The North American Mission Board has a Student Mission Group National Needs List, which has become a hot spot for groups looking for a project. Gone are the days when the board gave out assignments. Leaders are now asking, "Where is God at work so we can join Him?" This needs list has become the starting place. More and more group leaders are using the National Needs List.

Gain pastor and church-wide support

The best way group leaders gain support is by calendaring and budgeting early and paying attention to details. Wise financial planning is key to gaining the support of the church and staff. Many groups use a three-way split in dividing the cost of a mission trip among the student, the church and a fundraising activity. Other ways to gain church support are by planning a commissioning service before the trip, using prayer strategies during the trip (daily prayer guides for the church, prayer chains or prayer

partners) and by scheduling a reporting service after the trip. These things will help include the church in what God is doing in the lives of students.

Do a local mission project as preparation for the trip

This is a good answer to the query of "Why do they have to go so far on this trip? They need to stay here and serve." Many churches tell me they cannot do their own Vacation Bible Schools back home without the help of teenagers. The local mission project gives youth an opportunity to serve at home while preparing to serve others away from home.

Be aware of and prepared for safety issues

There are three safety preparations that are a key on any mission trip: do not let teenagers drive, be careful around water, and be sure about times of supervision. Some churches say their insurance policies make very clear what they can or cannot do on trips. The best mission projects create a sense of risk but at the same time maximize safety. Group leaders say the way to do this is through detailed preparation and clear communication with leaders.

Complete Student Mission Group reports and return them to Student Volunteer Mobilization at NAMB

Even with more than 20,000 participants involved in mission projects, the fact is, there is more being done for Christ. The view that numbers are important sometimes seems shallow, but I love to tell our convention how students are making a major contribution in winning the world to Christ! These reports give the information to tell this incredible part of the story. Through this report, leaders can also request a certificate of recognition for their youth group to frame and display, etc.

Use an intentional follow-up plan

There is strength in following up a mission trip with a discipleship small group study. Groups use the bounce of a mission trip to promote See You at the Pole or the formation of a Christian club on campus, not to mention individual opportunities to serve as Campus Missionaries or Sojourners.

John Bailey is an associate, Student Volunteer Mobilization, with the North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, GA.

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