



each one should use whatever gift they have received to serve others

faith without works is dead  
and Jesus said "Let the children come unto me."  
do unto others as you would have them do unto you  
for even the son of man comes not to be served, but to serve

mission outreach journal | north alabama conference



NORTH ALABAMA CONFERENCE  
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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# Table of Contents (click the section title to navigate)

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Introduction by Bishop Will Willimon	3
Mission in the 21st Century	4
New Challenges to Christian Mission Today by Dr. Thomas Thangaraj	5
How to Go	8
Why We Go as United Methodists	8
Churches Taking Their First Mission Trip	9
Church Who Want to Do More/Good Lessons in Mission	11
Creating Sustainable and Lasting Change	11
Mission Our Backyard	12
Mission Giving	14
Appendix	16
A. North Alabama Conference Advance Specials	17
B. <i>Preparing to Go</i> , a Bible Study by Rev. RG Lyons	23
C. The Importance of Mission for Youth by Rev. Robert Mercer	44
D. Mission with Children by Rev. Elizabeth Nall	46
E. Conference Disaster Response Plan by Rev. John Hassell	49

# Introduction

The North Alabama Conference was begun two hundred years ago by missionaries. Over the years, our churches have provided visionary missionaries all over the world. This great tradition continues. Is God calling you and your church into mission? The conference has compiled this Handbook so that you can join up with the amazing work that Jesus is doing all over the world. “In giving, you receive.” Those words are never more true than when applied to mission. There is not much wrong with us as individual Christians or as congregations that can’t be set right by moving out in Jesus’ name, reaching out to those in need, and joining in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Christ around the world.

Will Willimon

Bishop

The North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church

Last updated 3 November 2009 by Rev. Matt Lacey

# Mission in the 21st Century

The Christian church has been sending missionaries for nearly more than 2000 years. Paul set out, not as the perfect disciple, but as a person who was called by God to go to new places, encounter foreign people, and share how the story of his life was changed by the story of Christ. Paul was scared at times, and half the time he didn't know where he would be in a week's time. But despite all that could have held him back (and at times did hold him back), he still went. God pushed Paul until he moved.

Today, we live in a very different world. We live in a world where, 500 years ago, we could have been to a remote village with no church. Instead now, the presence of the Gospel has set foot in those unknown areas by those who have gone before us. Long ago, developing communication was a process of deep immersion into a foreign culture for missionaries; today, we can send and receive messages from different time zones and languages, and translate them with relative ease. In most areas around the world, the seed of the Gospel has been planted by fellow Christians, but that does not mean it has taken root. Sometimes, due to our own faults as Christians or circumstances outside of ourselves, the seed has fallen on the barren soil and among the thicket.

Sometimes the failure of the gospel to grow is not of the fault of the persons to whom we are witnessing, but our faults as a church. Perhaps we are still speaking a language of mission and evangelism that can no longer function in today's world. At times, we get so carried away with our task as Christians that we eventually fail to realize whose Gospel we are preaching. It is God's, not our own.

This does not mean that we have no part in God's movement throughout the world. We are called by God to each use our unique gifts and graces to spread the gospel in our own way—but we must do it in a way which honors the image of God in each and every person we encounter along the way. We must remember that we do not bring God—God is already there.

This handbook will help to serve you in this way: as a resource for you and your church to develop new missions and strengthen existing missions. The bottom line is this: God calls us to go. How we go has many different faces and answers. I hope this book will provide a resource to you, to help you explore the many, many faces of mission—in which God is the moving part.

– Rev. Matt Lacey

*The question is present before us: how do we do mission today? Dr. Thomas Thangaraj, Professor Emeritus of World Christianity at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University has a unique take on mission. Dr. Thangaraj was born in India in a village named Nazareth. Dr. Thangaraj gives us an unique view: a take on mission from the other side of the world as well as the challenges we as Western Christians and missionaries, face today in the rest of the world.*

# New Challenges to Christian Mission Today

by Thomas M. Thangaraj

More than two hundred years ago, people in my ancestral village of Chanpattu in Southern India renounced their Hindu religious tradition and embraced Christian faith. Since the whole village turned to Christian faith, they renamed their village as Nazareth. I owe my Christian commitment to the emergence of the village of Nazareth, and I am thankful to God for those Indian Christians who visited our village and proclaimed the good news of Christ. Soon the Anglican missionaries in the area came along, and worked among our people to establish churches in that part of the world. St. John's Church at Nazareth is now the Cathedral of the Thoothukudi-Nazareth Diocese of the Church of South India. Whenever I mention that I came from Nazareth, people do not fail to ask, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" and I boldly answer, "Come and see!" (John 1:46).

While I claim this history with pride, three things stand foremost in my mind. First, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude for the missionary work that took place in my village. I can join with Peter and say that once we were no people and now we are God's people (1 Peter 2:10). My people who were adherents of a popular form of Hinduism which demanded animal sacrifices and instilled a debilitating fear of the local gods and goddesses found the gospel of Christ to be offering them a sense of freedom and fulfillment.

Second, while I celebrate the arrival of Christian faith in my village, I am mindful of the ambiguities of Christian missionary enterprise. Christian faith which gave our people a sense of dignity and selfhood instilled in them, at the same time, attitudes and practices that devalued local culture, at times forced them to adopt foreign cultural practices, and alienated them from the wider community in uncreative ways.

Third, with all its ambiguities, the announcement of the good news of Jesus Christ proved to be a source of liberation for the people of Nazareth. As those who belonged to the lower rungs of the caste ladder and as those who had to deal with rich Muslim middlemen in their trade relations, they found the Gospel to be a source of cultural, social, and economic liberation.

This rich history should not blind us to the new situation in which we find ourselves today in India and in other parts of the world. Even though Nazareth sounds like a

success story, we cannot opt for simply repeating what the early missionaries did. There is a huge difference between 1804 and 2009 C.E. There are churches everywhere in India, manifested in almost one thousand different Christian denominations.

All these churches have active and lively programs of evangelistic outreach. There are several TV channels such as God TV, Angel TV, and so on that endlessly broadcast Christian programs sponsored mostly by American preachers and their counterparts in India. In the midst of such intense evangelistic activity, there is also growing opposition to Christian evangelistic efforts from Hindus who view the Christian missionary enterprise as a serious threat to the cultural and religious fabric of India. There have been attempts, at times successfully, to pass legislations banning religious conversion by coercion. Many challenges confront us in this new situation. Let me highlight two of them.

#### Mission and Membership Drive:

Two hundred years of Protestant missionary activity in South India has now secured a different face than it had before. Mission was once equated to acts of charity, programs of justice, and the enabling of liberated communities as churches and congregations. While these are still alive, sadly today Christian mission is equated to “membership drive” both by Christians and others. Christian rhetoric sounds as if membership accumulation is the primary or even the only mark of Christian discipleship. There are hymns which proclaim this as the requirement for entry into heaven. In place of spontaneous and neighborly sharing of one’s experience of God, we now have highly programmatic, systematically organized, and marketing-driven evangelism and that has given an almost “unchristian” character to our mission today.

This means that one of the challenges for today’s mission is to find ways to de-link mission and membership drive. It does not mean that we would refrain from inviting people to join the fellowship of the church; rather it would mean viewing church growth as one of the possible outcomes of our missionary work and not as a necessary and only result by which we can judge the success of our missionary outreach. Mission must recapture the daily expression of one’s love of neighbor through acts of charity and announcement of God’s forgiveness.

#### Mission and Neo-Colonialism:

In most non-Western countries, Christian missionary work has been closely connected to the colonial expansion of the West during the last three or four centuries. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that linkage has slowly eroded as those countries gained political independence from colonial control. Unfortunately, today due to the processes of globalization, Christianity is closely associated with the neo-colonialism that accompanies globalization. Even though globalization is a mixed bag with both helpful developments and highly harmful effects, in a country like India it appears as a cultural colonialism. The spread of free market economy and the explosion of information technology have brought quite a few of the cultural practices of the West into the land of India.

For example, Valentine’s Day is now celebrated in India and the whole thrust of the celebration seems to question and devalue the local culture regarding gender relations. Such a threat is not simply seen as Western neo-colonial domination; rather it is

closely associated with Christian expansion. The non-stop appearance of American Christian preachers on the TV screen reinforces such a perception of a linkage between Christianity and neo-colonialism. More than ever before, Christianity is viewed as a “foreign” religion!

What is required of Christian mission is to de-link itself from the neo-colonialism of today. Such de-linking can happen in several ways. Christians in India and abroad are called upon to offer a serious critique of the effects of globalization on local cultures, economic arrangement, and political developments. Such critique will enable Hindus and others in India to see Christian faith as good news and not as crypto-colonial activity. More than ever before the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ should be undertaken by local Christians and not by white Christian preachers, however resourceful and entertaining they may be.

The sending of missionaries from the West, going to the rest of the world, should not happen in any form to express the apostolic mission of the *whole* church; rather the wholeness of the Church may demand of us a supporting of one another in different parts of the world through our companionship and prayers. We all belong to a “catholic” (universal) Church, and supporting one another is part of our Christian discipleship.

We are also called to engage in mission in the company of and in collaboration with others who do not belong to the Christian religious tradition. Inter-religious dialogue and cooperation will free us from the linkage to the forces of neo-colonialism. Such inter-religious activity can de-link our mission from a purely membership drive as well.

New times require new forms of missionary obedience. Whether we are ready and willing to engage in such a new mission is the challenge today.

# How to Go

As Dr. Thangaraj describes in his article, the ways that missionaries have gone over the ages have changed. As Christians, the most important thing to remember when going on mission is that we are not called to change people. That is God's job. Instead, we are called to share our own story. The job of the disciples wasn't to go and meet new people just to rack up numbers, or to tell them how to live their lives. Their job was to go and meet new people and say, "Have you heard about Jesus? Let me tell you how the Son of God has changed me." Again, their emphasis was on how God could bring change, not themselves. As Christians, we can be agents of God's change or vessels through which God works but never the change itself.

# Why We Go as United Methodists

Mission is deep within our blood as United Methodists. John Wesley continuously stressed the importance of living out one's faith in the world—whether through money, service, or social engagement and action. In fact, John Wesley was a missionary to America from Great Britain. But Wesley's experience carries a great message with it, and it is a great example to us as we approach mission work today. Soon after Wesley arrived in Georgia to minister to Native Americans he began to feel immense vulnerability, something which we often shy away from speaking when we are doing mission. After all, mission is tough work, but we often think that just because God has called us to do something that the work will be easy, quick, and we will have the stomach for it. We feel that at times when we do mission, we need to go with a stiff upper lip, get the work done, and move on. Wesley learned quickly that this wouldn't work, and soon after began to approach mission in a relative way, with anyone he was working with. This is why we go as Methodists: because our heritage tells us that mission is about making a difference within ourselves, as much as making a difference anywhere else.

# Churches Taking Their First Mission Trip

There is almost nothing more pivotal in the life of a church than taking its first mission trip. It is an experience which not only changes those who go, but also those church members who do not go. Even those outside the church looking in are affected. A great way to start is for the church to ask itself, “What are we good at? What can we offer to the world?” And, more importantly, “What can we receive?” While most associate mission trips with the construction of buildings or churches, today, mission teams go to train pastors, meet medical needs, hold vacation bible schools for children, clean up disaster areas—some even go just to explore!

While some of these things may seem like a waste of time and money (hey, who wouldn’t want to make a concrete difference in the world?), it is important to remember this: it’s not about the work—it’s about the relationship. Simply spending time with someone on a mission trip is often the most important work people can do. Remember, this is a lot of what Jesus did! For instance, more often than not, teams who go to meet the needs of a disaster area go fired up about getting a particular area clean, or getting a building renovated. But they quickly realize that the greatest need in those areas is pastoral care. People affected by disaster have not only had their view of the world drastically changed, but they’ve had their view of God changed as well. That is something a hammer and nail cannot fix, but a person who listens and follows the Gospel can.

After you’ve asked yourself what you would like to be doing on this trip, the next step is to identify resources. There are literally thousands of organizations who could help you in this regard. As United Methodists, we have a great resource in United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM). UMVIM exists to gather these resources together and help you set sail out into the world to serve. UMVIM coordinates projects, people, and information so you can simply call and say, “Hi. My church is taking its first mission trip, and we want to serve in a medical clinic.” (See [www.umvim.org](http://www.umvim.org) for more information).

UMVIM is in contact with volunteers and missionaries on the ground throughout the world and will help you identify how to best serve with the resources you have. The United Methodist Church is a very connectional system with millions of points of contact. UMVIM seeks to tie up all those ends and serves as a hub for those thousands of mission opportunities. UMVIM also links with other North Alabama organizations such as Servants in Faith and Technology (SIFAT), as well as many others.

Of course, there are many other organizations who might be helpful to you—some which you simply “pay-and-go.” These organizations might suit your church more if this is your first mission trip. However, reaching out on your own to contact the host yourself, as well as developing the mission plan yourself, is a valuable learning experience which is certain to help your church grow in the mission field.

Here are a couple of tips for sending your first mission team:

- **Training:** UMVIM offers a team leader training course for first-time mission leaders year-round. Some kind of training is a must. Many of these trainings are held in the North Alabama Conference for a minimal cost. Contact the North Alabama Director of Mission and Advocacy for the latest training. Other groups also offer mission training.
- **Fundraising:** Realistically ask yourself how much money you can raise for participation in the mission field. Even if your budget isn't large, you can still serve. International mission trips are great experiences, but they do take a congregational wide effort for support. There are many opportunities in our backyard which cost virtually nothing.
- **Spiritual Gifts:** Examine what your church is really called to do in the mission field. If your church has a great gift for teaching, it doesn't make sense to go out and engage in a lengthy or specialized construction project. God calls us to use our unique gifts out in the world and work together as the body of Christ to serve in different areas.
- **Lasting relationship:** Ask yourself if your church can make this first mission trip into a lasting experience. Are you willing to make a solid commitment to continue to send teams to a certain area, continue work with a particular project? Be sure that you have the passion to continue serving, and do not make this a one-time experience.

Of course, before all of the planning comes the soul searching. As said above, a church taking its first mission trip (or its first one in a while) can be pivotal in the life of the church. **Rev. R.G. Lyons has authored a bible study based on the experience of going on a mission trip. This study is extremely helpful and will guide your church before, during, and after the trip. The study can be found in Appendix C.**

# Churches Who Want To Do More: Good Lessons in Mission

At times, when a church first engages in mission, they often think of an international mission trip or go to an established local mission not far from their church building. This is a great starting point, as well as a great way to sustain a mission program. But there are some churches who ask very important questions about how they are currently doing mission such as:

- Have our mission trips or programs caused sustainable and lasting change?
- If we have been successful in our mission, how have the needs changed?
- Do we need to better adapt to these new needs?
- What are the needs in the square-mile around our church building?
- Is our method of mission effective in today's world?

Let's address some of these concerns.

## Creating Sustainable and Lasting Change, and Changing Needs

There is something to be said for meeting an immediate need. If one is hungry, give them some food. What happens when their hunger is met? Often times in mission when we meet a need, we just walk away, and the same problem arises as when we first went. As the saying goes, we often go the way of giving people fish instead of teaching people to fish. We do this as churches or mission groups more often than not.

This situation disguises itself in various ways. Say, for instance, your congregation travels to Zimbabwe to build a medical clinic in order to treat malaria. Sounds like a great project! So you travel, build the clinic, and it turns out to be a self-running success in two years. Let's also pretend the number of visitors to that clinic balloons in three years. To many, it would appear that your congregation has made sustainable and lasting change; and in many ways it has.

But many churches, sadly, do not take the time to stop patting themselves on the back and ask themselves a question such as: "Why are so many people visiting the clinic?" The answer: malaria is widespread in the area. And while those persons now have a place to go, shouldn't the church be asking, "How can we work to reduce the number of malaria cases?"

It seems somewhat contradictory: by reducing the number of cases, the church reduces use of the clinic, thus rendering their earlier work somewhat useless. However,

there is one thing we must remember in mission: Christ calls us to work for a Kingdom in which needs are met. Sure, the clinic has met a need, but if the church wants to continue its work for the Kingdom, they must explore ways to make that clinic useless, such as educating the population about malaria prevention. After the clinic is built, why not take a similar trip to educate pastors in the area on malaria prevention to reduce cases? Perhaps one day, though you may never see it, the clinic your church built will be shut down not due to lack of funding, repairs, or staff, but because the further work of your church has done. Hallelujah!

## Mission In Our Backyard

Have you taken a look around your church lately? I don't mean at the shrubbery outside or the parking lot, but at the neighborhood that you stay away from, or the people you don't approach because they speak a different language? Let's try an experiment:

Say you live in zip code 35209, as I do. A simple internet search can show me census data for my zip code, absolutely free. A program called Mission InSight, which is available through the conference office, can also offer more detailed demographic information.

Race	Age						
	Male		Female		Both		
	% of Males	% of All	% of Females	% of All	% of All		
Hispanic/Latino:	3.8%						
White*:	67.8%						
Black*:	24.2%	0-9 years:	12.5%	5.8%	10.6%	5.7%	11.5%
Native American*:	0%	10-19 years:	11.5%	5.3%	11.9%	6.3%	11.7%
Asian*:	2.7%	20-29 years:	29.3%	13.7%	27.9%	14.9%	28.6%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander*:	0%	30-39 years:	18.1%	8.4%	15.7%	8.4%	16.8%
Other*:	0.1%	40-49 years:	12.2%	5.7%	11.6%	6.2%	11.9%
Multiracial*:	1.2%	50-59 years:	7.4%	3.4%	7.6%	4%	7.5%
* Does not include individuals in this racial group who identify as Hispanic/Latino.		60-69 years:	3.8%	1.8%	4.4%	2.4%	4.1%
		70-79 years:	3.2%	1.5%	5%	2.7%	4.2%
		80+ years:	2.1%	1%	5.3%	2.8%	3.8%
		<b>All Ages:</b>	<b>Male: 46.7%</b>	<b>Female: 53.3%</b>			
		<b>Median Ages:</b>	<b>28.9 yrs.</b>	<b>29.8 yrs.</b>	<b>29.4 yrs.</b>		

A simple glance at these statistics will tell you a lot. For instance, one of the first things to stand out is this: a good chunk of the community is between the ages of 20-29, almost double that of the next highest age group, 30-39. Relatively speaking, this community is young.

A good question to ask from here is: does my church look like this? Often in churches we continue to only serve those inside our walls, rather than outside. The point is this: does your church meet the needs of your community? Meeting the needs of your community may not seem like mission to you, but mission isn't always giving out food or other things we normally associate with mission. Mission can look like establishing a service more geared towards young people and the needs they carry. Mission can look like a divorce ministry if the statistics show that it is a common need in the area. Mission can look like developing a language program for Spanish and English speakers if your community is a multi-ethnic one.

While most churches take international mission trips once a year, or visit the local homeless shelter once a month, many churches fail to look inside their own walls for the need for mission. Doing this not only helps your community, but if you make a hard and honest effort, you'll find it will grow the church as well. **For a list of North Alabama mission opportunities, see Appendix B.**

# Mission Giving

As United Methodists, your church probably gives more than it thinks it does. Your apportionment monies are making differences all around the world, not just in the conference. Every year, your apportionments go to fund mission grants, which local churches and non-profits can apply to receive money to start new and sustain existing mission projects.

Your apportionments also go to serve United Methodist missionaries everywhere from Louisiana to Senegal. You may have no idea how many lives you touch simply by doing something you are probably already doing!

There is ample opportunity for what is termed “second mile giving” outside apportionments. There are many existing opportunities within the connectional system which your church may choose to support.

- **United Methodist Missionaries:** Though your apportionments do fund many missionaries, they still rely heavily on other support. The General Board of Global Ministries allows you to directly fund a missionary of your choice through their organization. The General Board of Global Ministries website ([www.gb-gm-umc.org](http://www.gb-gm-umc.org)) allows you to search missionaries by area of service, support by annual conference, and by name. These listings often feature biographies and updated information about their work.
- **United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM):** The Southeastern Jurisdiction office of VIM relies on support from local churches to keep their work going. While a general donation to VIM does not directly support a particular project, it does allow VIM to keep up its work and develop new projects around the world. A donation to VIM can, in effect, go to serve thousands of projects across the globe by allowing them to continue the work of connecting people with projects all over the world ([www.umvim.org](http://www.umvim.org)).
- **The Advance:** The Advance is a mission fund set up by the General Board of Global Ministries which allows churches to give 100% of funding directly to a particular project. The Advance lists nearly 1000 projects in over 100 countries. Chances are, if your particular church has sent a mission team to a UMC project, that project has an account set up through the Advance to receive direct giving. You can even track your donation online ([www.gb-gm-umc.org/advance](http://www.gb-gm-umc.org/advance)).
- **Local North Alabama Outreach Ministries:** Giving to local North Alabama outreach ministries, such as Upper Sand Mountain Parish and Urban Ministry, keeps these ministries open, viable, and effective. These organizations heavily rely on United Methodist Church support. Partnering with these organizations will allow you to see your support in action right here in Alabama. **For a list of North Alabama Ministries see Appendix A.**

Of course, there are many other avenues through which your church might give and support missions. These opportunities are simply a few of the most known throughout the conference. If you have any questions about giving, contact the North Alabama Conference office.

# Appendices

A. North Alabama Conference Advance Specials	17
B. <i>Preparing to Go</i> , a Bible Study by Rev. RG Lyons	23
C. The Importance of Mission for Youth by Rev. Robert Mercer	44
D. Children’s Mission Resources	46
E. Conference Disaster Response Plan by Rev. John Hassell	49

## Appendix A

# 2009-2012 North Alabama Conference Advance Specials

The North Alabama Conference of The United Methodist Church endorses various projects, agencies, organizations, and/or institutions as partners in mission in ministry. This partnership exists to encourage second-mile giving from local churches and individuals through "The Advance for Christ and His Church." These ministries are known as Conference Advance Specials.

Being approved as an Advance Special project means that an organization's goals and purposes fall within the missional concerns of the annual conference and that the administrative practices of the organizations meet certain guidelines recommended by the conference Board of Global Ministries and approved by the North Alabama annual conference. It is understood that approved agencies shall comply with all Advance stipulations, limitations, and requirements of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church.

Acceptance as an Advance Special project is the conference's seal of approval of the institution's ministry and an indication that it has met standards of accountability set by the broader church.

### **AHMEN (Alabama Honduras Medical Educational Network)**

Dr. Tom Camp – General Coordinator  
588 Llama Lane  
Quinton, AL 35130  
(205) 384-8023  
[llamacamp@hughes.net](mailto:llamacamp@hughes.net)  
[www.honduranmissions.com](http://www.honduranmissions.com)

### **Attentional Growth Ministries**

The Rev. Dr. Jim Robey, Executive Director  
364 Plantation Lane  
Gulf Shores, AL 36542  
(205) 960-3157 (cell)  
(251) 968-6184 (home)  
[Jim@attentionalgrowth.org](mailto:Jim@attentionalgrowth.org)  
[www.attentionalgrowth.org](http://www.attentionalgrowth.org)

### **Community Enabler Developer, Inc. (Anniston)**

Mrs. Maudine Holloway, Executive Director  
1411 Gurnee Avenue  
Anniston, AL 36201  
(256) 237-6144

(256) 237-3238  
[commenab@bellsouth.net](mailto:commenab@bellsouth.net)

**Fayette County Cooperative Ministry**

Rev. Carol Lambert, Director  
5992 Highway 18 West  
Fayette, AL 35555  
(205) 932-5849  
[preacherlady@froglevel.net](mailto:preacherlady@froglevel.net)

**Upper Sand Mountain Parish**

P. O. Box 267  
Sylvania, AL 35988  
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[usmp@farmerstel.com](mailto:usmp@farmerstel.com)  
[www.uppersandmountainparish.org](http://www.uppersandmountainparish.org)

**Reaching Accessibility for Methodist Persons & Churches (RAMP)**

Debbie Wade  
962 Black Road  
Somerville, AL 35670  
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**Dream Garden, After School Enrichment**

Mrs. Pashion Lewis, Director  
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**Epiphany Ministry, Inc. of Alabama**

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**Greater Birmingham Ministries**

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**Restoration Mission**

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**Kairos Outside of Alabama Prison Ministry**

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**Outreach, Inc.**

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[frank@inoutreach.org](mailto:frank@inoutreach.org)  
[www.inoutreach.org](http://www.inoutreach.org)

**PEER, Inc. (Promoting, Empowerment & Enrichment Resources)**

Community Development  
The Rev. Sally Allocca, Board President  
7753 First Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35206  
(205) 836-3201  
[smcallocca@aol.com](mailto:smcallocca@aol.com)

**Safe Harbor, Inc.**

Mr. Rock Hobbs, Ex. Director  
P. O. Box 381386  
Birmingham, AL 35238  
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**Servants in Faith and Technology (SIFAT)**

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**Society of St. Andrew's - Alabama**

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## Appendix B

# Preparing for the Journey, a study by Rev. R.G. Lyons

# a world awaits

and we're  
going to help  
you get there



## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christians have been a missionary people – that is, Christians have felt God calling them to take the gospel throughout the world. Jesus commands us to do this.

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” – Matthew 28:19-20a**

Throughout the ages, Christians have responded faithfully to Jesus’ commandment. Paul insisted that God’s grace was for all, for Jews and Greeks, and became one of the first missionaries to travel all over the region. The theologian and physician Albert Schweitzer gave up a lucrative medical practice to share Jesus’ love with those who could not afford medical treatment. Mother Theresa gave her life to serve orphans and the “least of these” throughout Calcutta, India.

The history of Christian Mission has been a mixed bag, however. For every Mother Theresa, we have stories of Christians from the West forcing Africans and Native Americans to convert to Christianity at gun point. Many times, mission became an excuse to justify the control, exploitation, and enslavement of peoples throughout the world. Wars have been fought in the name of Christian Mission. People have been burned at the stake and killed in the name of Christian Mission.

It seems that Jesus has entrusted us with a very dangerous tool in commanding us to be in mission to the world. When used rightly, mission has brought life and hope to millions of people all over the world. And when used wrongly, mission has brought death and grief to millions of people as well. We have a tremendous responsibility then to prepare ourselves to be the kind of missionaries Christ would have us to be. Nothing is more important in this process than understanding our motivations and goals for doing mission work.

This booklet seeks to help those working through Volunteers in Mission to do just that, to gain a Biblical and Christ-centered understanding of why we do mission and what mission should look like. Because this booklet seeks to promote a Biblical model of mission, it should be used like a Bible study. This is not a “how to” booklet in terms of explaining the logistics of being part of mission teams. Rather this booklet seeks to foster the spiritual formation and development for those who are participating in these experiences. Of course, the experience itself is most important. Everyone I know who has participated in a mission experience has been impacted spiritually through that experience. This booklet merely seeks to aid the spiritual formation that is already taking place. Part I of the booklet will be a series of Bible studies designed for spiritual preparation before the mission experience. Part II provides a guide for reflecting during the mission experience. This part is much more general than Part I as the reflections should be guided by the experiences of the trip. God always works in strange and mysterious ways, so it would be quite foolish for us to try to guess how God’s Spirit will move in each experience. Finally, Part III will be a guide for debriefing from a mission experience. Each session will have reflections on Scripture, stories to illumine the Scripture, and questions for discussion. All of the discussion questions are in italics. If time does not permit using all the questions, it will be up to the leader to choose which questions are the most important.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to keep a journal from this point until you return. Often times, writing down our thoughts is one of the most important spiritual disciplines we can practice to foster our spiritual formation. For each session, there will be a list of suggested journal topics. But do not feel limited to these. Be open to the Spirit’s leading and if you feel the need to focus your journal time on an entirely different topic, then please do so. The last thing this booklet should do would be to confine the movement of the Spirit in your hearts and lives.

Grace and Peace to you as you serve Christ through this mission experience.

## PART I PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

### BEING SENT – Session 1

**“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” – John 20:21**

Jesus tells us that we are sent in the same manner that he was sent, or in other words, we are sent to do the same things Jesus did.

*What are the things Jesus did? (For example, Jesus healed, Jesus welcomed children, etc.)*

Our first rule of thumb in doing missions, then, is to constantly ask this question, “Are we doing the things Jesus did?” A case study can help us see the danger of failing to constantly ask this question in our mission work.

#### **Rwanda: A Case Study**

In 1994, nearly 1,000,000 people were killed in about 2 months in Rwanda. This was the most effective and efficient genocide in the history of the world. And at the time, Rwanda was the most “Christian” coun-

try in the world, with 85% of its inhabitants professing faith in Christ. Clearly, for many in Rwanda, Christianity had nothing to do with the life and teaching of Jesus. We must ask, “What went wrong?”

In Rwanda, there are basically two ethnic groups: The Hutu and the Tutsi. They basically lived together peacefully before European colonization and “Christian” mission work. When the Germans and Belgians colonized the country, they set up Tutsis as overseers and enslaved the Hutus, who were the vast majority of the population. It was the Tutsis who were required to whip the Hutus and exercise control over them. The arrival of Christianity in Rwanda was very closely tied to the arrival of colonialism. The German and Belgium colonialists recognized that, in order to rule Rwanda using a very small number of their own troops, they would need to divide the Rwandans and develop a dominant and a subordinate group. The Christian Church provided the ideology for this division. Recognizing that the Tutsi were taller than the Hutu, the colonialists declared that Tutsis were part of the Hamitic race, or those who descended from Noah’s son Ham, who migrated to Rwanda and subdued and conquered the Hutus. The Tutsi came to be seen as “European in black skin.” The missionaries quickly set up mission schools where they could prepare the Tutsi to lead the country, thus providing the needed stability for colonial exploitation. One of the missionary reports from 1927 stated, “With the Tutsi Christians the missionaries hope to achieve the creation and formation of a social elite that is pro-European. Such an elite is needed. Christianity will provide it.” Therefore, from the very beginning, the missionaries decreed that religion would be the vehicle for political power. It would convert the Tutsis and appoint them as the ruling elite. In turn, the Tutsi would closely follow the orders of their “white fathers.”

This “Christian” method of colonization set up tremendous division between the Hutus and Tutsis. Eventually, the Hutus gained political power, and, in 1994, they began a systematic campaign to kill every Tutsi.

*How did the missionary work of the Europeans contribute to the genocide?*

*What were the Europeans’ motivations and purposes for doing mission work in Rwanda?*

*What were some of the things the missionaries did that were not in accordance with the things Jesus did?*

*What would Jesus’ way of mission have looked like in Rwanda?*

*What does this example teach us as we are about to enter into a mission experience?*

The Europeans who evangelized Rwanda viewed those in Africa as godless heathens who should be so grateful to receive the gospel, that they would become slaves and serve the European countries. In reality, these so called “heathens” lived peacefully with one another until the “Christians” came and taught them “Christianity.” While the very worst short term mission trip would not have the same effects as years of missionary work in support of colonialism, the story of Rwanda teaches us that we must be clear about our motivations and purposes for serving as short term missionaries.

Are we going to convert the “godless heathens” or are we going to experience life with our brothers and sisters across the world?

Are we going to help the poor people who can’t help themselves or are we going to form relationships and solidarity with God’s children in another place?

In addition to being clear about our motivations and purposes, we must also be clear about what we are going to do. Jesus gave the disciples certain tasks when he sent them out.

### **Sent to Witness**

**Acts 1:8 “And you will be my witnesses in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.”**

Typically, we tend to associate witnessing with evangelism. And many people tend to associate evangelism with “saving souls.” A typical evangelistic experience for many might sound something like this:

Person 1: “Have you ever accepted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?”

Person 2: “Well, I’ve been going to church most of my life, and I believe in God and everything.”

Person 1: “But have you accepted Christ? You see the Bible says that the only way to have forgiveness of sins is to accept Christ as our personal Savior. Let me ask you, if you died tonight, where would you go? Would you be in heaven or hell?”

Person 2: “Well, I guess I’m not sure. I mean I would want to go to heaven.”

Person 1: “You can be sure! Just pray this prayer with me...”

There are several problems with this kind of evangelism. First, it uses fear to convince people to have faith in Christ. There is not one example in any of the gospels where Jesus scared someone into following him. Secondly, this method of evangelism promotes selfish reasons for professing faith. Jesus asks us to, “Deny yourselves and take up your cross” (Mk 8: 34). If the only reason we accept Christ is because we want to go to heaven, then we’ve missed the whole point of the gospel. Finally, this method of evangelism claims to know more than we as humans can know. To claim that there is only one way to God means that we are claiming to know the mind of God. God is so big that God is not confined to the boxes we set up. C.S. Lewis reminds us that we may indeed be surprised to see some of the people we find in heaven.

When we evangelize in this way, we make the focus all about the other person. “**You** need to accept Christ... **you** need to repent... **you** need to pray this prayer.”

To witness, though, means that we share with others what God has done in our lives. We are witnesses to **our** experience of God’s work in the world. And the first way we witness is in how we live. We live differently because of what Christ has done for us. To witness means that people should see the love of Christ in us. What people see in us is far more important than what they hear from us. And when we witness with our lives, then our words will have more meaning. When others can **see** what God has done in our lives, then they will be willing to **hear** what God has done for us. Therefore evangelism is no longer about, “You need to do this.” Rather, a Biblical model of evangelism says, “This is the love of God that I have experienced in my life and you can experience that same love as well.”

“Preach the gospel always...if necessary, use words.” – St. Francis of Assisi

### Mike’s Witness

Mike is one of the most powerful witnesses for the transforming power of the gospel that I know. For over twenty years, he was a drug addict. In remembering life in addiction, Mike says that everything he did was controlled by drugs. His whole life was about getting his next hit – that is until God saved him. His children started going to church, and Mike went by the congregation to check on his kids, and the next thing he knows, he’s talking with Pastor Lewis about the healing power of the gospel. Today, Mike is one of the leaders in the drug recovery program where he found healing, he works for Urban Ministry and supervises work teams that paint houses for low-income people, and he tells anyone willing to listen about what God has done in his life.

For Mike, witnessing is about sharing with others what God has done for him. He doesn’t point the finger, he doesn’t tell others what they should do, he doesn’t try to scare people. He simply says, “This is what God has done for me.” And Mike knows that when people see what God has done in his life, they will realize that God longs for them to be made whole as well. He says, “The natural human instinct is if God did this for him, then God can do it for me.” And God has done it for many people through Mike’s witness. Hundreds of people have found healing from their drug addiction through the program that Mike now leads.

Mike is an example of a true witness for Christ. He knows that the way he lives is the strongest witness he can give. He says, "When I was using drugs, I worked 24/7 for the drug dealer. My life was about getting \$10 so I could get more drugs. Why can't I be like that for the Lord? If I could give all of myself to drugs, then I can give all of myself to the Lord." And because Mike gives all of himself to the Lord, others have experienced the healing power of the gospel and given themselves to the Lord as well.

*How would you describe your experience of God?*

*What are some meaningful ways that people have witnessed to you?*

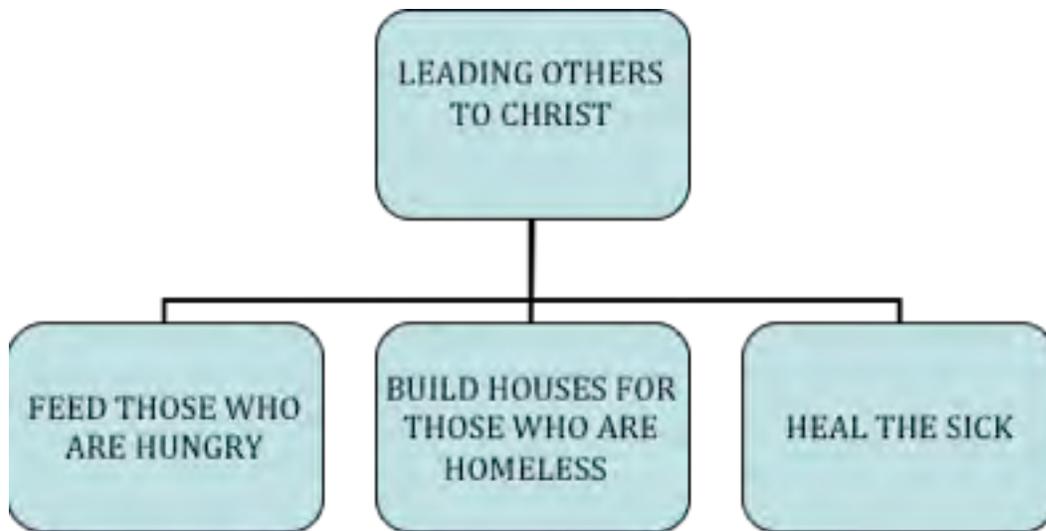
*How can you be a witness on this coming mission experience?*

### **Sent to Serve**

Read Mt 25: 31-46

*According to this passage, how do we know if we are truly followers of Christ?*

It is interesting that Jesus only mentions actions. No where in this passage does he tell us to tell people about him or to evangelize. Often, service is seen as a means to an end. Some of the conventional thinking is that we serve so that we can build relationships of trust so that we can convert people to faith in Christ. The model would look something like this:



This model, that views service as a means to an end, however, is not Biblical. James says, "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?" (James 2:15-16). Jesus never had ulterior motives for healing people. He did not heal people so that they would become his followers. He healed people because God sent him to heal...just like God sent him to call people to follow him. In the same way, our service to others must be an end in itself. It is not a way to manipulate people into accepting Christ.

*How did Jesus demonstrate serving others throughout his life?*

*What are some of the ways we can serve on this mission opportunity?*

### **Sent to Love**

**“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” – John 13:34**

In mission trips, we often feel we are sent to work. We are there to feed people or to build houses or to work in a field. Many times, it is easy to let the work blind us to what God really cares about: people.

Read Mark 5:25-34

The gospels tell of an encounter Jesus had with a woman who had been suffering for twelve years. This encounter, though, was unplanned. Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ house, a very important place. Jairus was a leader of the synagogue whose daughter was ill. He needed Jesus’ help, and Jesus was on the way to heal her. But Jesus’ journey was interrupted. Out of the crowd this woman, whose name we do not even know, made her way to Jesus and touched his cloak and immediately was healed. But then Jesus did something very strange; he asked who touched him. Have you ever wondered why Jesus asked? The woman was healed. Wasn’t Jesus’ work done? Apparently not. While this woman had been healed physically, she was still broken emotionally and spiritually. For 12 years she had been unclean. No one could touch her; no one could show her love. It was not enough for Jesus to simply heal her physically. Jesus wanted to let her know that he cared about what she was going through. Jesus took the time to love her and to form a relationship with her. He called her daughter, making her part of God’s family and reintroducing her into community.

In doing mission work, we must let love guide everything we do. It is important to do work, to build houses for people, to serve food, to labor physically. But it is just as important, maybe more important, to build relationships, to be in community and solidarity with those we serve.

**“There is more hunger in the world for love and appreciation than for bread.” – Mother Theresa**

*What are some of the most important relationships in your life?*

*How have you experienced love and appreciation through relationships with others?*

*How can we let love guide our service and witness on this mission experience?*

*How can you open yourself in this mission to be fully present as Jesus was to this woman? What do you need to change in yourself to transcend the need to do and instead, be?*

### **Suggested Journal Topics**

- 1) Any of the discussion questions listed above.
- 2) Why are you going on this mission trip?
- 3) What is Missions to you?
- 4) How can I be fully present to those around me as Jesus was for this woman?

### **GRACE 101 – Session 2**

**“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” – Ephesians 2:8**

The story of grace is central to the message of the gospel and it is central to our theology as United Methodists. John Wesley stressed that God’s grace was prevenient. Or, in other words, God’s grace is be-

stowed upon all of us even before we realize it. God's grace is present everywhere and upon every person. And yet, we often live as if God's grace is something we have to earn or something we can control.

Read John 4:1-26

*What had the Jews told the woman at the well about worship? How did grace fit into their understanding of worship?*

*What did Jesus tell her about the kind of worship that God desires? How did grace fit into Jesus' model of worship?*

## **WHAT'S YOUR GRACE MODEL?**

### **Limited Grace**

Those who told this woman that she must worship in Jerusalem had a limited understanding of God's grace. For them, God was confined to a particular place, the temple in Jerusalem. With this model, they were able to be the gatekeepers, that is, they could set the rules as to who could receive grace. Notice what the woman says, "You say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." She had been told where she must go to receive God's grace. But this model of grace not only involves location. For her to go to worship in Jerusalem, she would be worshipping in the temple. And there were certain rules that people had to follow to be allowed to enter the temple. Because this woman was a Samaritan, she was automatically rejected. She was considered unclean – not fit to enter the temple – not fit to receive God's grace. In this model, God's grace was reserved for some, but not for all. God's grace was for the "chosen people" and not for Samaritans. This was a limited view of grace.

*What are some of our attitudes toward this mission experience that might reflect a limited grace model?*

This model of limited grace is at work when we, those who are doing mission work, view ourselves to be, in some way, superior to those we are going to serve. This model says, "There but for the grace of God, go I." When we say similar statements, we may mean that we are thankful that we do not suffer from extreme poverty, that we have clean drinking water, that we have a roof over our head, etc. But the underlying assumption behind that statement is that God loves us more. God has shown more grace to me than to other people.

Those who follow this model say, "We are going to take Jesus to them." We may mean that we are going to share Jesus' love with those we are going to serve, but again the underlying assumption is that Jesus' love is a commodity that we control and can distribute out to those to whom we chose to give it. It's the same as the Jews saying that God must be worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. They were claiming ownership of God's grace and the authority to determine who was worthy to receive it. The woman at the well fell outside their grace model.

Jesus operates on a different model.

### **Extravagant Grace**

*Where does Jesus say is the location of true worship?*

*Under Jesus' model, are there gatekeepers to God's grace?*

Jesus says that God is not limited to a particular place or to the rules of human gatekeepers. Rather true worship is done in "spirit and in truth," or in other words, true worship is something that comes from the heart. And because it comes from the heart, it is something that every single person can do. Because it comes from the heart, then other people can't set up rules to determine who can and who cannot worship.

This model of grace says that God is available to everybody, that no one person or one group of people have a monopoly on God's grace. It's available to all.

**“We never take God anywhere; we find God already present.” – Bishop Ken Carter**

### **Back to Purpose**

The grace model that we have affects our motivation and purpose for going on a VIM experience. With a limited grace model, we may think we have God's grace and we need to take it to those who do not have it. With an extravagant grace model, we know that we are not taking God anywhere. God is already there. We are simply going to witness to where God's grace is already at work.

Acts II: 19-26

*What did Barnabas find when he came to Antioch?*

*What do you expect to find or experience on this mission trip?*

**“Grace has no bounds.” – Alan Storey**

### **Grace and the Homeless**

To illustrate the boundless nature of God's grace, I want to share a personal story. When I was in college I went through a crisis of faith. I didn't know what I believed. I quit going to church. Finally, I ended up one Sunday at a congregation in downtown Birmingham called Church of the Reconciler. This is a very unique church as about ½ the members are homeless men and women. I went, almost as a desperate attempt to hold on to what little faith I had left. After the service, a homeless man came up and introduced himself to me and said, “I'm glad you're here.” I said, “Thanks, this is a great place. I think I'll come and volunteer here.” Even though I was impoverished in faith, I still felt like I was the one who was supposed to be helping; I felt that I was the one who was supposed to bring grace to this homeless man. I was acting as if I were the gatekeeper to grace. I was going to come and volunteer. The man said to me, “Volunteer? I don't want you to volunteer to help me. I want you to worship with me.” So I did. And over time, I listened as homeless people shared with me their struggles with poverty and violence and drugs. But I also listened as many of them shared with me their amazing faith in God, and, as I listened, I began to regain my faith. I began to see that I didn't need to bring God's grace to them because God's grace was already there in a real and powerful way. And as I witnessed God's grace in the lives of homeless men and women, I began to see how God's grace was at work in my life.

### **Jesus as Missionary**

Phillipians 2:5-8

Jesus was a missionary. He was **sent** from God to come and share love with the world.

*According to the passage we just read, what are the attributes of Jesus' missionary work?*

*What can we learn about the way that Jesus became one with the people with whom he was sent to serve?*

Luke 5:17-26

When Jesus sees the paralytic, the first thing he does is say, “Your sins are forgiven.” What had this person done to receive forgiveness of sins? Nothing. He was simply lowered through the roof in the room where Jesus was, and Jesus offered him words of grace. Jesus had never met this person before and yet he

knew that God's grace was already present in his life. Jesus always took an extravagant view of grace. God's love and grace is present in the life of every single person in every single place.

*What does this passage teach us about the magnitude of Jesus' love?*

*How can we be missionaries like Jesus in this experience?*

**“Jesus loved loving more than anything else in the world.” – Alan Storey**

Suggested Journal topics:

- 1) How have you experienced grace in your life?
- 2) Is your purpose for going on this trip motivated by a limited or an extravagant model of grace?
- 3) How can you be a witness to God's boundless grace on this mission experience?
- 4) How might you be a recipient of God's boundless grace on this mission experience?

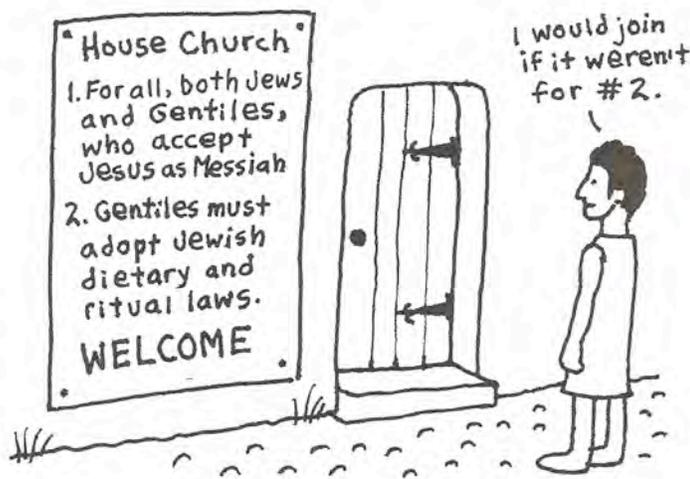
### **TAKING THE GOSPEL VS. TAKING OUR GOSPEL – Session 3**

We never live out our faith in a vacuum, but rather we strive to be Christians while also living in a particular time and place with a particular culture. Often times, our faith is so immersed in our culture that it is difficult to separate what is necessary for our faith and what is added on by our culture. There's nothing wrong with our culture influencing the ways we worship God. In fact, it is impossible to completely avoid this. It becomes a problem, however, when we believe that people have to accept our culture if they are to accept the gospel. Or, in other words, it becomes a problem when we begin to believe that our culture and the gospel are the same things.

*What are some of the elements in our church that reflect our culture?*

*Do we live as if some of these cultural elements are essential to the gospel?*

The early Christians had the same problem. The first great debate in the early church was whether or not Gentiles could become Christians without accepting Jewish culture. Some said that Gentiles must be circumcised, that is they must take on the mark of being a Jew. But Paul came along and said, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. The only thing that counts is faith working through love.” Faith and love are universal. Every culture in the world places a value on faith and love. Circumcision was a particular cultural practice of the Jewish people. Paul is saying that the gospel of Christ transcends culture.



This picture shows that the Jewish emphasis on circumcision prevented some Gentiles from joining the church. We always run the risk of alienating people if we assume that our way of living out the gospel is the only way.

*What do we know about the culture where we are going?  
(This would be a good place to teach participants about the culture)*

*What in our culture might be offensive to those we are going to serve?*

### **CULTURE AS A MEANS TO WORSHIP**

Our particular cultural practices do not have to be something negative. Many elements that are unique to a particular culture can provide meaningful ways to draw us closer to God. Paul never said Jews should quit being circumcised. He recognized that the Jewish practice of circumcision was a way for Jews to enter into meaningful covenant with God. Paul did not have a problem with the practice of circumcision. Rather, Paul had a problem with people saying that circumcision is the only way to God.

*What elements from your own culture bring you closer to God?  
Can you imagine how these cultural elements might appear to Christians from other cultures?*

### **The Gospel and Native American Culture**

Just as elements from our culture enhance our worship of God, elements that are unique to other cultures (that might even seem unchristian to us) can enhance worship as well. Read the following excerpt from Brian McClaren's *A New Kind of Christian*:

The character in his book, Pastor Dan Poole, was talking with a group of Native American ministers. Dan asked them, "Do any of you use Native American culture in your church services back home?" Each one denied doing so until one finally said:

*"I am Hopi, and one of the most meaningful memories in my life is being a boy, before our family became Christians, and being at the pow-wow. We would dance and dance for hours each day. You see, in Hopi culture, dance isn't just symbolic. Dance is actually a form of prayer. Every time my foot stamps on the ground, I'm saying something to the Great Spirit that I could never put into words. My whole body is praying as I move around the circle."*

“By this time, he was standing and demonstrating the movements. Then he sat down again and put his head in his hands. ‘One of my greatest dreams,’ he said, ‘would be someday to lead my congregation in a Hopi dance of worship to my Savior.’”

*Many Western Christians have assumed that rituals from other cultures contradict the gospel of Christ, but what does this story teach us?*

## LEARNING TO LISTEN: THE STORY OF PENTECOST

Read Acts 2:1-13

*Is this a miracle of the tongue or a miracle of the ear?*

For centuries, we’ve interpreted Pentecost as a miracle of the tongue: the disciples are given tongues of fire to proclaim the Good News of the gospel. But, if we take the Scripture seriously, then we see that the miracle of the tongue is only half the story. The Scripture says, “Each one **HEARD** them speaking in the native language of each” (Acts 2: 6 emphasis mine). Maybe if we look at this passage as both a miracle of the tongue **AND** a miracle of the ear, we might gain a more complete understanding of this passage.

The disciples are locked up in a room. Their leader had been crucified and they are afraid they could be next. The “devout Jews from every nation” are free to wander about throughout Jerusalem – they do not have to hide behind locked doors. Now in this context, who seems to have the most power? It’s the crowd. They’re free. The disciples, before the coming of the Holy Spirit, are powerless, they are afraid, they are hiding behind locked doors. So maybe the miracle of Pentecost is that the powerless are given tongues to speak and the powerful are given ears to hear.

*How might the Church be different today if we understood the story of Pentecost to be a miracle of the ear, of the powerful being given ears to hear?*

## YOUR CONTEXT

*What are the power dynamics between you and those you are going to serve?*

You live in the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. You have the resources to travel on this mission experience. If you get hurt or injured or sick, no matter where you are, you will have insurance that will take care of you.

*By and large, you have more power than the people you will meet. According to the story of Pentecost, what is the first thing you should do?*

*How does this understanding of Pentecost change our understanding of what it means to be in mission?*

For years, the traditional understanding of missions has been for those in positions of power to go and tell what they know to those who are powerless. This is the same kind of missionary work that we discussed at the beginning when we looked at Rwanda. Those who were conquering native peoples believed they were better, believed their culture was better, and believed their religion was better. So in Rwanda, they tried to make the Tutsis accept European Christian culture. When the powerful come, not to listen, but to assert control, terrible consequences are the result. The gospel, on the other hand, is about giving the powerless a voice. Jesus was not from Rome, the center of political power, or from Jerusalem, the center of religious power. Rather, Jesus was a poor peasant from Nazareth. The story of Pentecost teaches us that the gospel is best proclaimed not by those in power but by the powerless finding a voice.

In our first session, we looked at how God has sent us to love and to form relationships. If we come in a position of power, we can't form relationships. Power is about control and authority. Relationships are about love. Today, we have examined some of our cultural and power differences. Relationships between people of different cultures do not just happen; they require work, and, for those of us in positions of power, the first step is to surrender our power and **LISTEN**.

**“What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life.” – Henri Nouwen**

### **Suggested Journal Topics**

- 1) What are the challenges about seeing listening as my first responsibility on this mission experience?
- 2) What cultural baggage am I bringing with me? What do I not understand about the culture to which I am going?
- 3) What part of my culture have I mistakenly believed is essential to the gospel?

## **ENCOUNTERING JESUS – Session 4**

In our first session, we looked at how we are sent to witness, serve, and love on this mission experience. We are also sent to receive.

### **The Gift of the Poor – Back to Matthew 25**

Read Mt 25: 31-46

*Why does Jesus associate himself with “the least of these?”*

We looked at this passage several weeks ago to talk about the kind of service God asks of us. The most striking part of this passage is that Jesus tells us that, “Whatever we do for the least of these, we do for him.” In other words, Jesus is telling us that if we want to find him, we have to go to the hungry and thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisons because that’s where he hangs out. In a sense, then, when we go to the poor, we receive far more than we give. We might help build a house for them or provide medical supplies or serve food. But they give us Jesus. In preparing to go on this mission experience, expect nothing less than an encounter with Jesus.

*On this trip what are some ways you may encounter/meet/experience the living Jesus?*

*How might this understanding of Matthew 25 affect your purpose and motivation for participating in mission work?*

### **The Gift of Hospitality**

When we go on a mission experience, we must not forget that we are guests who are invited to enter into the lives of others. Often, we feel guilty to accept the hospitality offered to us by those less fortunate financially than we are. When I was a seminary student, I spent some time in South Africa and stayed several weekends with families living in informal settlements, or what we would call “shanty towns.” Each time I stayed with a family in the informal settlement, they made sure that I received the biggest portion of food, that I received the bed (the family would sleep on the floor), and that I received the only chair. At first, I

felt terrible about this arrangement. I felt I was depriving people who were in drastic need. Shouldn't I be the one giving to them? But as we spent time together, I began to see the incredible joy these families took in offering hospitality to me. I begin to realize that my discomfort had more to do with my concern for myself than for the families. In our society, I normally have more power than people in informal settlements. I have the power to give or not to give. And yet, in this instance, the power structure was flipped on its head. Being able to offer hospitality inverts the normal structures of power. I was dependent on people in shanty towns instead of them being dependent on me. My hostess had the power to give her bed, her food, and her chair to me. If I refused her offer of hospitality, I would have robbed her of her power and reclaimed it for myself.

The kingdom Jesus proclaimed was in many ways an Upside Down Kingdom. The gospel is filled with examples of Jesus making the last, first by inverting the normal power structures. After the resurrection, Jesus first appeared to women, thus inverting the sexist power structure of his day. When calling his disciples, instead of choosing the best educated, Jesus chose fishermen. By learning to receive hospitality on this mission experience, we can learn to give up our power and to accept Jesus' way of inverting power structures. And perhaps that is the gift the poor offers us. Because the poor are powerless, they know what it means to depend on God. And by offering hospitality, they claim power for themselves and put us in a position of dependence. And when we recognize our dependence on the poor, then we are in place where we can meet Jesus. We realize that we are completely dependent in the arms of a loving God. And it is in that place of dependence where we can find Jesus and his Upside-Down Kingdom.

**“Many who are first will be last and the last will be first” – Mark 10: 31**

*What do you need to give up in your life to encounter Jesus?*

*How can you prepare yourself spiritually to live the reality of this Upside down Kingdom?*

*How might this mission experience help you learn to give up some of your power?*

### **Michelle's story**

A friend of mine, who also spent time in South Africa, experienced Christ through receiving hospitality from a woman who was very poor. It was a difficult experience for her, but one in which she and a woman named Gertrude experienced the love of Christ through the giving and receiving of hospitality. Here's her story:

*“I have had the opportunity to visit with a woman named Glenda who runs a ministry called Phakamisa. Phakamisa means, “to lift up” in Zulu. Glenda has done such a marvellous job of empowering the older women in the communities to learn how to properly care for the children who have been orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. The women come in for training at the church I work at and there is a whole network of leaders in the communities who report back to Glenda the needs of each community. Glenda took me with her one afternoon to visit with the Gogos (grannies). We met them at a local school where they had planted this beautiful garden. I sat on the ground next to Glenda and listened to each of the Gogos give her report about how her work was going. One Gogo, Gertrude, shared with us that she was raising 6 orphans and that she barely had enough food to feed them. She was 73 years old. As we were preparing to return back to the church, Gertrude met us smiling on the road. Her arms were full of avocados. She gave an avocado to Glenda and one to me. My first reaction was to say, “No, I can't take this. You have children to feed.” Yet, something in her eyes stopped me. I could tell that this meant so much to her to give me this gift. Yet, it was so very hard for me to receive.*

*I have thought a lot about this avocado. It is funny how one little vegetable can stir up so much emotion. What shocked me was that this woman who had so little to feed her and the children she cared for would offer me food. If it were something she had made it would have been easier for me to accept. Her gift of the avocado was as extravagant as the woman who poured a whole bottle of perfume on Jesus' feet. Her ex-*

*travagance shocked me. It is difficult for me to receive hospitality such as this. I responded in the same way that the disciples responded to the woman. I missed the point just as they did.*

*This woman demonstrated a trust in the abundance of God's grace with her gift of the avocado. I was worried that she would not have enough to feed herself or the children. Yet, she trusted that God would provide for her needs. This is the gift that the poor can offer us. For, I have never once in my life had to wonder where my next meal was going to come from. I don't know what it is like to rely on God for food. The faith that this Gogo had was so beautiful it still moves me to tears.*

*It is just as important for me to learn how to receive hospitality as it is for me to give hospitality. For, if I only give, then I am belittling the humanity of the other who is trying to participate in a friendship with me.*

*So then, in our relationship with the poor, we often enter these relationships with a certain good we want for the other person. Maybe our relationship is based on our desire for them to have a job, to have an education, or even simply for them to have food to eat. Yet, this is not really true friendship. True friendship is more about the desire to know the person than to obtain a certain good for them.*

*I must admit that I really wanted this woman to have food. I believe that our right to life includes our right to food, should it not? I don't think this is a bad desire, but I understand the danger in imposing my desires for this woman upon our friendship, for then I am not truly becoming her friend. I am creating a relationship based on the power I have to bring about a certain good in her life, rather than understanding the certain good she can bring into my life just by my knowing her.*

*I am quite sure I will never look at an avocado again without seeing the face of my friend Gertrude. I hope to visit with her again. Yet, if I never set eyes on Gertrude again, just knowing her for one day has changed me. So often the Greatest Commandment is categorized as a "thing we must do". Yet, I believe that this type of love, to love another as ourselves, is like a present to us all. For as we accept the fact that each of us is a child of God created in God's likeness, we can catch a glimpse of God hidden in the faces of each other. This is indeed a gift and a blessing! Yet, so often we live our lives never opening these gifts God has placed before us. What if I had turned away my avocado? What if?"*

A word of caution: there is a fine line between receiving hospitality and going to be served. The point is not that we go to be served, but that, in our service, we also receive the hospitality of the people. Jesus said, "The Son of man did not come to be served" (Matthew 20:28). But he also spent large amounts of his time receiving hospitality. He ate in the homes of Pharisees and tax collectors. A poor woman anointed his feet with costly perfume. Jesus came to serve, but part of his service was not only to give but to receive hospitality.

*What is the difference in going to be served and in serving while also receiving hospitality?*

*In your day to day life, how do you respond to receiving gifts? Is this a comfortable or awkward experience for you?*

*How do you feel when you extend hospitality to others?*

*In this mission encounter how will you respond to the hospitality offered to you?*

## **SENT TO BE TRANSFORMED**

Read Acts 10:1-35

*How was Peter changed because of his mission work with Cornelius?*

Peter was a missionary. Cornelius invited him to come to his home and share the gospel with them. But in this experience, Peter was changed more than Cornelius. And this was no small change. God used this encounter with Cornelius to challenge Peter's very understanding of who God is. For Peter, to follow God meant that he must avoid things that would cause him to be unclean. There were certain foods he couldn't eat, there were certain people he couldn't touch, and there were certain homes he couldn't enter. Peter's religion, his view of God, forbade him from entering Cornelius' home. But God had other plans. God longed for Peter's transformation and God wanted to remove everything in Peter's life, even his religion, that was an obstacle to that formation. Peter had to learn that God is more concerned with relationships than with religion.

Sometimes we can be like Peter. Sometimes some of our deepest and most sincere religious beliefs can blind us to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Jesus summed up Christianity by saying that we are to love God and to love people. Starting with this foundation, perhaps we should be willing to risk being transformed in every other aspect of our faith. The Holy Spirit has a history of transforming those who are sent to do mission work. So as you leave for this VIM experience, be open to the Spirit's leading. Change is not always easy. You may find that some of your deepest beliefs that you have held for years might come into question. You might even find that, like Peter, even your religion is called into question. Do not resist the struggle. It was not easy for Peter. But through the struggle, Peter came to a more authentic understanding of who God is and of God's purpose for his life. If you are open to being challenged through this VIM experience, then trust that through the struggle, you too will gain a more authentic understanding of God and God's purpose for your life.

Peace be with you as you serve.

### **Journal Topics**

- 1) In what areas of your life do you hope to be transformed by this VIM experience?
- 2) How have your motivations for participating in mission work changed after preparing for this experience?
- 3) Is there an aspect of your religion that hinders authentic relationships? If so, how might God be challenging your religion?

## **PART II ON THE JOURNEY**

This section offers possibilities for reflection and prayer to help process each day's experiences during the VIM trip. Because all trips are different, it will be up to you to determine which of these questions and prayers would be most meaningful for reflection as you process your experience. Mission work can be very draining physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is often tempting to forego the reflection time and head straight to bed at the end of each day. I strongly encourage you to resist this temptation. Leaving time to reflect, to journal, and to support one another in prayer not only encourages and strengthens you for the work but also helps to foster a lasting spiritual impact on you and on those on your team.

During a mission experience, there may be some days when people have far more negative reflections than positive ones. During encounters of pain and suffering, sometimes it is difficult to see signs of hope, which is another reason why processing the experience together and supporting one another in prayer is so crucial. The message of the gospel is that in the most hopeless of situations, on a Roman cross, Jesus brought hope and life to the whole world. Reflect and process the pain, but always be aware of the signs of hope and the places where God is at work.

**Sample Reflection Questions:** It may be helpful to give people time to journal about these questions individually before sharing with the whole group.

Where did you see God's grace already at work in this community today?  
 Where did you encounter Jesus today?  
 How were you Jesus to others today?  
 When did you experience failure and when were you discouraged?  
 How were death and suffering present today?  
     How were life and joy present?  
 What signs of hope did you see today?  
 What would Jesus have done today?  
 How does it feel to not have an answer to all the questions?  
 What kinds of poverty did you see today?  
 What did you learn from the people we met today?  
 What did you not understand today?  
 What can these two communities do together as a result of our time together?  
 How will this encounter change the way you live when you return home?  
 What has this experience meant to you?  
 What Scriptures speak to your experience today?  
 What challenged you today?  
 What did you struggle with today?  
 In what ways has your faith been challenged?  
 What is something new you learned today? (skills, culture, etc)  
 What shocked you (culture, religion, lifestyle, etc.) today?

### **Prayer and Encouragement**

Often times, mission experiences can be very emotionally draining. For some of you, this mission experience may be your most profound encounter with human pain and suffering. It is important for the group to offer support and care for one another. Many of the above questions allow people to share their feelings over the day. Another way to do this would be to invite people to share prayer concerns and then to pray for one another. Here is a suggested way of sharing

**SHARE CELEBRATIONS:** What were the encounters of the day where you experienced life and joy, where you saw Jesus and his grace manifested in your life, in your group, and among the people?

**SHARE CONCERNS:** Where did you encounter pain and suffering today? Who would you like the group to remember in prayer? How do you need support in your own life through what you are encountering?

**SHARE COMMITMENT:** What is God calling you to do or to change in your own life through what you experienced today?

There are many meaningful ways to enter into prayer together after each person has had the opportunity to share. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Partner Prayer: Find a partner and take turns praying for the other person and for the things he or she has shared.
2. Communal prayer: Provide a prayerful liturgy (like Prayers of the People) for the group to pray together. The liturgy should reflect the experiences of the day.
3. Journal: Invite the group to spend time alone and write their prayer in their journal. This provides more time for personal reflection and introspection.
4. Circle prayer: The leader begins by praying for the person to her right by placing her hands on his shoulders. The prayer should not be long and it may be spoken or unspoken. The personal touch is important. When finished, the leader goes on to the next person until she has prayed for everyone. After each person is prayed for, he or she stands up and prays for each member of the group just as the leader did. In the end, each person will have prayed for every other person.

5. Musical prayer: Many find musical chants to be meaningful ways of praying. One person would develop a simple tune and simple words to express a prayer. For example, “Lord, bless the poor. Lord, bless the poor...” After repeated several times, the prayer could change (with the same tune) to another prayer concern (i.e. “Lord, teach us love...”). The Taize community is a great example for this sort of prayerful meditation.

### PART III

#### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

**“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” – Phillipians 1:6**

You have been given a tremendous gift. You have been given the opportunity to experience life with your sisters and brothers in a different place. You have had the privilege of serving them and of receiving from them. Often times, it is difficult to come home. Many people who have participated in mission experiences struggle to find ways for their mission work to affect the way they live at home. This part of the booklet seeks to help those of you who are struggling with the question, “Where do we go from here?”

#### From Charity to Justice – Session 1

**“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” – Micah 6:8**

Short-term mission work is, for the most part, about charity. And charity is an important Christian obligation. Mother Theresa spent her whole life offering charity to others. But charity, by itself, is not enough. The Bible teaches us that we are all called to meet the needs of those who are suffering (charity). But the Bible also teaches us that we must address the reasons why people suffer in the first place (justice).

*What are the needs of the people where you served?*

*How did you work to meet those needs?*

*What do you think are some of the causes of those needs?*

*How could you begin to address the causes?*

*What ways can you help others to understand your experience and the needs of those you encountered?  
(part of the VIM experience is to translate your experience for people back home.)*

*Do you see similar needs and situations to those you experienced on your trip in your own communities?*

Here are some statistics that may help us understand some of the causes of poverty in our country and across the world. In the U.S., the average pay of a CEO of a Fortune 500 company is 1000 times the pay of someone making minimum wage. The richest 50 people in the world control more wealth than the poorest 416 million. 40% of the world’s population live on \$2/day. This 40% receives 5% of the world’s income whereas the richest 10% receive 54%.

*Where are you located within these statistics? How does your answer affect your understanding of the cause and effect relationship between poverty and wealth in the world?*

*How might the rich in the world (even people like us) contribute to the poverty in the world?*

## **God's Gift of Manna**

### **Read Exodus 16:1-20**

This story happens shortly after God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. In many ways, the story of Egypt reflects the conditions of the world today. Pharaoh owned all the land (wealth in the hands of a few), people were enslaved and had to work constantly so Pharaoh could get richer (many women and children throughout the world work 12-15 hours a day in sweat shops being paid around 21 cents an hour to make the shoes and clothes we wear). Therefore, when God delivered the people of Israel from slavery, God gave the people the Torah, the law, in part to ensure that Israel would not become that which they left, to ensure that Israel would not become Egypt. The preface of the Ten Commandments says, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery..." In other words, the commandments are deeply connected with God's delivering the people from slavery. They are to ensure that no one will be enslaved among God's people. And one of the ways to make sure that Israel would not become like each was for the people to learn to share. By giving the people of Israel manna, God was not only providing them with food but also teaching them a lesson in sharing. In fact, learning to share was the first thing God taught the people of Israel after delivering them from Egypt.

*What happened to the Manna of those who gathered more than they needed?*

*What does this story teach us about poverty, wealth, and excess?*

*What is the manna in your life?...in your community?*

Maybe a first step in moving from charity to justice is to learn that hoarding stinks, that when we take more than we need, others do not have enough. And when others do not have enough, when others suffer in poverty, our hoarding becomes a stench in the nostrils of God.

## **God's Justice vs. Our Justice**

The lesson of Manna demonstrates a Biblical model of justice, and often times, a Biblical understanding of justice is different than the pervasive notion of justice in our society. We tend to think about justice in terms of the criminal justice system, about bringing the guilty party to justice. This kind of justice is usually about punishment. David, a homeless man that I know in downtown Birmingham, knows about this kind of justice. Here is his story:

David was working at a waffle house and living in his car. He had finally been able to get a job and was hoping to save enough money to be able to get off the streets. He soon ran into a problem when a police officer noticed that David had an expired tag on his car. The officer did his job, ran a background check on David, found that he had an unpaid traffic fine, and arrested him. At his court date, he was given an additional fine with a deadline. But since he missed work the night that he spent in jail, he was fired. Consequently, David had a larger fine and no way to pay the original fine since he had lost his job. As time went on, David was not able to get enough money to pay this fine, so he was given an additional fine. David became trapped in a justice system that hindered rather than helped his recovery from homelessness.

The Biblical model of justice is drastically different. In the Bible, justice is not about punishing perpetrators, but about restoring that which is broken.

### **Read Isaiah 58: 6-7**

*What is the connection between loosing the bond of injustice and feeding the hungry?*

*Where did you see injustice on your VIM experience?*

*How can you work to bring a Biblical form of justice to that situation? What about at home as well?*

**“True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.**

### **Journal Topics**

1. What are some areas of my life where I hoard? How can I apply God’s lesson of Manna to these areas?
2. What are some ways I can share my resources with those in need?
3. What are some of the injustices of the world against which I feel God is calling me to work?
4. How can I incorporate a Biblical view of justice into my life?

## **LIVING A MISSIONARY LIFESTYLE – Session 2**

For most of you, this VIM experience was a time of intense service. You were missionaries for a short period of time. You formed relationships with people who may be different from you. You witnessed to God’s love and you served others. You may have had a deep personal encounter with Jesus and have felt that your life has somehow been changed. And now, you are back home.

*What was that first Monday like when you had to get up and go back into work? Or the first day that you had to get your kids ready for school? Or even the first church meeting that you had to go to where people argued about things that may no longer seem so important to you?*

The challenge, now, is to avoid allowing this VIM experience to become a one or two week experience that has no affect on your everyday routine. How can you foster a missionary lifestyle?

*What experiences on your VIM trip were the most transformative for you?*

*What frustrations have you experienced as a result of your transformation since you have returned home?*

### **Back to the Great Commission**

**“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.” – Acts 1:8**

*Where does Jesus tell the disciples to begin their work?*

Through this VIM experience, you have been able to be Christ’s witnesses in another place. We are commanded to do this. But Jesus first commands the disciples to witness in Jerusalem, to witness at home. Too often churches make a habit of serving Christ in the ends of the Earth, while ignoring service opportunities at home. I hope that this VIM experience will encourage each of you to live as missionaries in your hometown and to find ways to serve there.

*Why is it sometimes easier to go somewhere else to serve people in need than to serve people at home?*

*What are the needs of your community? Where are the places of pain and suffering?*

*How can you be Christ’s witness in Jerusalem (in your home town)?*

If we take Jesus’ words seriously, then we realize that he expects us to live a missionary lifestyle all the time. Through the VIM experience, you have been able to serve others and give of yourself, but you have also received an incredible gift. You have been received by your sisters and brothers in another place. You have experienced life with them and encountered Jesus among them. You may have experienced the

beauty of another culture and the scenery of another place. And Jesus tells us that he has expectations for us when we receive such wonderful gifts.

**“To whom much has been given, much will be required.” – Luke 12:48**

Peter also received a gift.

Read John 22:15-19

Peter was able to spend three years walking around with Jesus, listening to him teach, witnessing the miracles he performed. Peter was able to experience forgiveness when he failed by denying Jesus three times. And here, at the end of John’s gospel, Peter’s encounter with Jesus is about to change. His time for walking around Galilee with Jesus is over. Jesus is leaving, but before he goes, he gives Peter a job to do. Jesus expects Peter to no longer be the same after experiencing life with him. He expects Peter’s daily life to be a response to his encounter with Jesus. And that’s the same challenge for you.

*What gifts did you receive from this VIM experience?*

*How can you live your life in response to these gifts?*

*How can you “feed Jesus’ sheep” where you live?*

### **Work as a Holy Calling**

Read Ephesians 4:28

*Why does Paul tell thieves they must stop stealing and work honestly?*

For Paul, the purpose of work is to have something to share with the needy. In this way, all work is a holy calling. We, in the church, have a tendency to think that only pastors, or foreign missionaries, or the like are the ones whose job is a holy calling. For others, their job is simply a way to pay the bills and put food on the table. The Bible does not share that view. All work is a holy calling and so we must ask how we can use our job to serve God’s purposes. How can we use our work to live a missionary lifestyle?

For some, you may feel God calling you to find another job. Peter and the disciples left full time work as fishermen to be apostles. But this is not necessarily the case for everyone.

Read Luke 19:1-9

*How was Zacchaeus’ job affected by his encounter with Jesus?*

After Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus, he was still a tax collector, but a different kind of tax collector. Instead of using his job to exploit the poor, he used his job to serve the poor.

*How can you use your work to serve God?*

*How can you use your work to serve others?*

**“Your vocation in life is where your deep joy and the world’s deep pain meet.” – Frederick Buechner**

### **Journal Topic**

1. What do you feel God is calling you to do or to change in your life as a result of this VIM experience?

## CONCLUSION

This is the end of this booklet, but it should not be the end of your reflection and processing of your VIM experience. Rather, perhaps this VIM experience could be the beginning of living a reflective life, not only on this mission trip, but on how you can live as a missionary where you are. If you have been faithful to this study, then you have fostered the spiritual disciplines of study, reflection, and journaling. I encourage you to continue practicing these disciplines.

For some of you, this experience and this study may have produced more questions than answers. That can be a frustrating thing, but it is not a bad thing. I encourage you to continue to ask the hard questions, to continue to struggle to find the answers, and to not give up if some of the answers do not come. One of the paradoxes of our faith is that the more we encounter Jesus, the more we realize how little we truly understand, the more we realize the truth of Paul's statement that we only see dimly (1 Corinthians 13: 12).

But through this experience, I hope you have seen that you are not alone. There are children of God all over the world wrestling with the same questions, the same struggles. There are people who have experienced the very depths of human pain and yet have an inexplicable joy that even they do not understand. And somehow, there is great hope in that. There is great hope that all of us can experience that joy in the midst of our pain and struggle, in the midst of our lack of understanding. So continue to struggle and wrestle. Continue to seek out ways to experience life with your sisters and brothers in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the Earth. Continue to ask the hard questions. For perhaps it is in embracing the struggle that we truly find what Jesus termed, "the abundant life."

Blessings on your journey!

- Rev. RG Lyons, Pastor, Community Church Without Walls

## Appendix C

# The Importance of Mission for Youth

by Rev. Robert Mercer

For some popular youth mission destinations, [please click here](#), or go to:

<http://www.umvim.org/newsite/umvim/web-content/Pages/national/youth.html>

Experiences in missions are a vital part of the youth group experience. It is through short term mission trips where youth and adults alike can be significantly transformed into the person and the group that God has created them to be.

Engaging in mission experiences is a natural expression of our love for God. Being a part of Missions is not something that we do to gain favor with God nor is it something we do to impress our brothers and sister. We engage in Missions because we are compelled to live a Christ like life, caring for our neighbors and sharing with them the love of God.

Providing opportunities for our youth to enter into service learning projects can have a significant impact on teens today. A healthy approach to short term missions projects sees them as an opportunity to build kids as well as serving others. Some youth workers have argued that youth going on mission trips actually get more out of the experience than the people they serve. Some teens who participate in mission trips are changed radically and some find a calling to a career in mission and advocacy. Duffy Robins sates in an article for Youth Specialties that “popular wisdom of late has it that the way to build disciples is through relational ministry, through missions and service projects.”

Serving in Missions can also have a dramatic effect on the youth group community as a whole. When a community of faith is introduced to a different way of living that community is forever changed. Will Penner in an article for YM Today.com says that his group will never be the same because of short term missions. Penner quoted on of his kids, “I want to go home. I want to forget everything I just saw and experienced, and I want to go back to living life from my bubble, not knowing that people live the way we just did and live it 24 hours a day, seven days a week.” The kids in his group started saying things like we need to do this at home. Short term missions can help your group become more the community that God intends.

United Methodist youth groups have a chance to affect mission activity around the world through the Youth Service Fund. YSF is a fund given by youth, administered by youth for youth service projects. This is a fund is a commitment by United Methodist youth to those who are in need. Local youth groups can raise money for service projects and give a portion to the Mission Team of the Conference Youth Leadership Team of North Ala-

bama. This team in turn will send a portion to the United Methodist Church Youth Service Fund where monies are granted for youth projects worldwide. Youth ministries can also request YSF funds from our Annual Conference and the General Church. You can contact connectional ministries for more details; 1-800-239-7950 or [www.northalabamaumc.org/youth](http://www.northalabamaumc.org/youth).

## Appendix D

# Mission with Children

by Rev. Elizabeth Nall

Teaching children to serve and participate in acts of mission from a young age is a beneficial Christian act of grace which is important to the spiritual formation of our children. Modeling missions is a great ministry perspective to work from when interacting with children. The Christian education goal with children is to internalize a desire to share with others, which is the baseline for building a mission minded perspective. Young children can help put together packages, make cards, collect funds, share of their time, and help in numerous ways. As the children get older you can focus in on why they are serving and provide follow through with the mission initiative so they can grasp the full picture of why they are serving. For example, instead of just collecting cans, have the children box and deliver the cans to those who are in need. Meeting the people who are receiving the cans helps the child know how their canned collections are serving others and brings the mission project full circle.

A servant's heart needs time to develop and grow. Be patient with children as they learn about giving. Children notice differences and they will ask questions regarding variations in their life and those of the people they are serving, such as, "Why does their house look different than mine?" Help the children learn to be respectful and recognize that they are serving—not providing a hand out. Everyone is of sacred worth in God's eyes and people need help at different times in their life. Explain to the children that the person they are serving needs help at this time, and there will be time when they need help in their life. As Christians we serve one another because Jesus served. You are planting the foundation for a mission minded heart. Help the children reflect upon their service opportunity. Ask the kids what they learned, and ask the children, "Do you think Jesus showed up?" Encourage the children to build relationships with those whom they are serving and foster an environment of continual service with individuals. Develop the children's eyes that they might see opportunities everywhere they look to serve. As the children use their hands to serve remind them to pray for the people that they are serving.

### Preschool-Age Children

Preschool age children must first learn "mine" before they learn how to share. If parents and Sunday school teachers can model and explain to the children the mission project and the concept of sharing the goal has been accomplished. You might have a difficult time taking away from a two year old a card, craft, or anything that they made to share with someone else. It would be a practical learning experience for a two year old to make one item to give away, as well as one to keep for themselves.

Explain to the preschooler what they are making, why they are making it, and where the mission item is going. Show the child a picture of the place where the item is going and possibly a picture of a child who will receive the donation item. For this age group a collection drive where the children bring books to share, toys to donate, or clothes to give away is a very tangible idea that they can grasp. If you are creating a birthday bag or purchasing Christmas presents let your child pick out toys for a child their age who is of the same gender.

## Early Elementary (Kindergarten through Second Grade)

Making the mission project very tangible for this age group is the key. This age group enjoys collecting items, raising funds, and helping others. Early elementary kids can grasp circumstances that would apply to their own life situations. A child's birthday is the biggest day in their life, and a child this age can understand what it would be like to have no birthday cake, party, or gifts on their birthday. A wonderful mission project for this age group is to raise funds for the United Methodist Children's Home to supply a birthday party with cake and gifts for a resident.

Whatever mission project the child participates in attempt to tie back the mission experience to the child's life. Whether it is gathering school supplies or raising funds for Camp Sumatanga, remind the children of their positive school or camp experience. When circumstances permit this age group should work collectively to accomplish goals, or work as a family unit when possible to serve. This helps foster learning that the church works together as the body of Christ to serve God's people.

## Older Elementary (Third through Fifth Grade)

It is typically at the age of ten or eleven years old that children begin to develop past thinking concretely into the realm of analytical interpretation. It is a rare and precious jewel who has the ability to *empathize* at the young age of eighth or nine years old. This age group enjoys helping and takes pride in satisfying others and bringing others joy through serving. Allow this age group to visit sites and have interaction with those they are serving. There might be circumstances where people who the children are serving are not grateful for the children's presence and gift of service. This is a perfect opportunity to explain to the children why Christians serve. We are not serving others for our gratification or to receive a thank you from the one we are serving. We are answering God's call to meet the basic needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Make sure to provide reflective follow through after the service event. Begin to ask questions regarding the concept of empathy. Discuss the situation of the person you are serving in detail and ask the children what it would be like to live a life without some of their favorite things. Ask the children to place themselves in the shoes of the one you were serving. Ask them what it would be

like to have no home, money to buy food, toothbrush or toothpaste, no shower, no Xbox, iPod, or no iPhone. What would it feel like to live in this person's circumstances?

Discuss with this age group the concept of sharing their monetary gains with those in need. Help them internalize and memorize the powerful statement made by John Wesley "Make all you can, save all you can, give away all you can!" Ask the children how this mission experience might change the way they save and give away their money.

Activities churches can participate in with their Children to teach them about mission right here in the North Alabama Conference!

Check out the following websites to learn more about mission minded Christian education for children:

**Passport youth and children's mission camps**—Birmingham, Alabama

<http://www.passportcamps.org/2010/home/index.html>

**SIFAT** - (Servants in Faith and Technology)

Your kids can have a mission experience right here in Lineville, AL. Your kids can learn about children from poverty stricken areas of the world and what daily life is like in their world with lack of resources. The kids can experience staying in huts or slum buildings along with learning about technology that is used in primitive parts of the world to create access to limited resources in these areas. Visit the website and take the kids from your church to experience a world of various cultures and missions right here in Alabama. To learn more check out the SIFAT website <http://www.sifat.org/>

**Some of our Favorite websites for Children's Missions:**

General Board of Global Ministries: <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/>

United Methodist Volunteers in Missions: <http://www.umvim.org>

United Methodist Children's Home <http://www.umch.net/>

Urban Ministries <http://www.urban-ministry.com/>

Dream Garden Director: Pashion Lewis, 533-6497, email [bhamdreamgarden@hotmail.com](mailto:bhamdreamgarden@hotmail.com)

Camp Sumatanga (Happy Camper Fund) [www.sumatanga.org](http://www.sumatanga.org)

Heifer International – [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)

Medical Missions for Children - <http://www.mmfc.org/>

## Appendix E

# Conference Disaster Response

by Rev. John Hassell

*In North Alabama it is never a question of whether or not we will have to deal with a natural disaster, but rather when, where, and how serve.*

Your North Alabama United Methodist Church stands ready to respond to natural disasters. We do this by preparation prior to, response during and long-term recovery following. Prior to a natural disaster, NAC Disaster Response and Recovery Teams train in Early Response. This training includes; how and when we respond, activity training, such as clean-up, tarping, and case management, to name a few. During a disaster we respond with Early Response Teams to bring the love and care of Jesus Christ to those who's lives have been effected by the disaster. Last, but certainly not least, we are there for the long haul through our partnership with Volunteers in Missions Teams. We are first in and last out. We are the hands and heart of Christ to those who are hurting. We are The North Alabama United Methodist Church Disaster Response and Recovery Team.

Your churches can be a part of the effort by having a local church disaster response plan in place, training is available through the Conference Disaster Coordinator, John Hassell. This training prepares local churches to be ready with church plans, should it be effected by a natural disaster, as well as how your church can be involved in the community in the event of a local natural disaster. This is both a ministry and a mission opportunity for your church. You can form Disaster Response Teams, who would be trained as Early Response Teams. Most of all, you can become a presence in the midst of a disaster that lets folks know that the United Methodist Church cares about them.

We invite your church to become a part of our response and recovery plan. The time to prepare is before your must respond. The time is now! You will be blessed while be a blessing to others.

[To view the North Alabama Conference Disaster Plan, as well as see how your local church can prepare for disaster response, click here.](#)