Our world is messy. Mission can get messy. How much should we clean it up for our youth?

Basic Premises of Missions
1. Mission is about relationships that reveal God.
2. It is both an honor and humble call to be part of God’s mission. It is not an option.
3. The goal of mission is positive change for all (See UMC Four Goals of Mission).

Basic Premises of Youth Ministry
1. Youth are smarter than they get credit for.
2. How we disciple our youth and engage them around mission shapes the church as whole.
3. God can use youth in powerful ways.
Biblical Texts - Name Verses your Youth Use

Love One Another

Jesus washing feet

Matt 25

Just Do it? Looking at Standards of Excellence

* Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Service (attached)
* Best Practices for Short-Term Mission Trips by (attached)
* Eight Reasons I was Wrong About Mission Trips by Rich (attached)
* Use Resources put out by others - UMC’s Global Ministries, Group Publishing, Area-specific non-profits or organizations like National Coalition for the Homeless.
* Use Conference Connections and Support - contact staff, participate in Conference Uth4Mission, Mission U, VIM Teams, ZimCamp, partner with UM churches and groups - www.wpaumc.org

THERE IS BEAUTY IN GETTING OUR HANDS DIRTY

“Jesus gets in the grime and muck of life. If we follow Christ (the Sufferer), we too are going to have to get dirty. Really dirty. All the time. Not just on the special, once-a-year mission trip to Central America, where we get to eat exotic food and touch a lizard.” from “Dirty Word” by Jim Walker
**1. PREPARE**
Include time for more than logistics

**Ask**
Ask the youth to name what they know, stereotypes, or questions. Ask why

**Creatively Assign**
Have youth do Google Races for research or skits on stereotypes. Let the prep be part of regular ice breaker or fun activities.

**Invite**
Your host site partner to come and speak. What should we know about serving with you?

**Require**
Lift up prep as just as important. No effort to show, no serving.

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**2. ENGAGE**
The people and problems of service with joy and grace

**Relate to People**
Leaders model for youth a focus on people not achievement by looking in eyes, greeting people, asking names. Respect host’s way of doing things.

**Allow Fun & Talk**
Include people you are working with in the fun. Tell stories and share your dodgeball disasters with the people you serve - let them get to know you with supervision.

**Allow Tension**
Let the idea of serving but not solving be ok. Does one meal or act of service matter? Is it ok to be disappointed? Do we still do it?

**Teach Trust**
By encouraging to step out of comfort zones with support, youth learn trust in God, self, and church

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**3. REFLECT**
On self, community, God, and faith afterwards.

**Personal**
Have them choose journals, devotions, twitter convos, blogs or vlogs or creative projects. Again, make it an expectation, not option.

**Group**
Share personal reflections as a group or use them to put together a group story.

**Scripture/Worship/Prayer**
Close with meditation and Scriptures that emphasize listening, visuals, songs, and hope. Celebrate God!

**Ask**
Keep asking questions. How are the people we met while serving doing? What have you done differently since our team served? Have a ‘What’s Next’ board where they can post new ideas anytime.

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**4. REPEAT**

A Long Term relationship - even for short-term service - often has a deeper impact on both the serving group and the partner group.

Tasks, locations, and roles can change but ongoing work with a group or geographic area has many benefits.
Try a ‘Mission Series’ like a Sermon Series

Sample Mission Series on Homelessness for one year cycle - be consistent and creative!

Opening Project (on-going all year)- Plastic Sleeping Mats - Have youth and other church and community groups make crocheted or woven plastic sleeping mats. Set a goal to be reached. How-to videos on YouTube. Places like Daily Bread Soup Kitchen in Pittsburgh like to give those out.

1. Soup Kitchen /Meal service (first time for this year’s group)

Prepare: Homelessness - Intro - What do you think of? What it is or isn’t by definition of different organizations. Share fact sheet. Ask host organizers what they call people who come, teach some basic vocabulary.

Engage: Serve at soup kitchen. Adults can model eating meals with and talking to clients. Don’t force youth to do that just yet.


2. Transitional Housing Visit


Engage: Visit to Liberty House, Erie United Methodist Alliance - transitional housing for veterans. Plan Veteran's Day or holiday dinner, play games, listen. Ask host staff for best way to hear the stories of some residents.

Reflect: Have youth share stories and experience with congregation via video, blogs, worship service.

3. Poverty Simulation or Privilege Activity

Prepare: Homelessness pt 3- Breaking the cycle: Why Is It So Hard? Continue reflection on why it is harder for some to get out of homelessness if we know the causes. Brainstorm a web of things that might complicate improving situations - include silly or stupid. List questions. Goal is recognition, not to arrive at answers, justifications or solutions.

Engage: Online poverty or privilege simulation (either in-house activities or UM Seminar program with UM staff at Board of Church and Society.)
**Poverty Simulation**: PlaySpent.org  Make choices to see how you would survive. Goal is to survive without needing help or public assistance. Ask what changes would have made it more possible to survive?

**Privilege Awareness Activity**: YouTube: “What is Privilege?” from BuzzFeed Yellow. Watch video then replicate activity.)

**UM Seminar**: Staff at GBCS design a that can be personalized to your group’s interest, region, experience, and age level. Could be part of 1-3 day experience in Washington, DC or New York City or for within your location. “Seminars are topical and include experiential exercises, small group discussions and opportunities to express what you’ve learned in various art forms.”

**Reflect**: Allow space after for people to share what was good, bad, confusing, uncomfortable, or exciting. Recognize people can care about people and problem but think differently on how to respond. Discuss if it is ok that people react differently. Close with Bible meditation and prayer emphasis on common trust in God’s faithfulness, promises and leading.

### 4. Return to Soup Kitchen

**Prepare**: Discuss whether the view of what the people at soup kitchen need is different since first time going. Practice conversations with conversation starting phrases given… Encourage students to think about what they could offer in addition to food. Sleeping mats, prayer stations, foot washing, …? Discuss with soup kitchen host and ask for permission, suggestions, off-limit areas.

**Engage**: Return to soup kitchen. Both model and encourage students to interact and eat with clients. Divide group into early servers and early greeters/eaters and then switch. Offer (with option to say no) the approved other service or gift to clients.

**Reflect**: How was it different to engage beyond serving food? How did people react? Why might some people react positively or negatively? Is it ok if people are not grateful or don’t respond? Close with Bible meditation and prayer. Try to use names of clients or detailed situations this time.

### 5. Housing Work Team

**Prepare**: Fundraising. Discuss how the gift of service starts in how they sacrifice or work for the costs matters. Have youth share why it is important for church to serve. Use host site prep materials and ask for additional information for preparation if they don’t include culture, economic, info.

**Engage**: Serve with the host group. Include Bible study/worship, and mini-reflection points in your time so that different experiences or questions can be shared as a group. Encourage to team to think about relying on Christ and identity

**Reflect**: Celebrate the relationships and service in worship and in youth. Name where you see God is at work. Recognize that the youth have shown power and ability to learn, to share, to make a difference, to glorify God in their witness.
BRIEF OVERVIEW: The Seven Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission

1. **GOD-CENTEREDNESS** An excellent short-term mission seeks first God’s glory and his kingdom, and is expressed through our:
   - Purpose — Centering on God’s glory and his ends throughout our entire STM process
   - Lives — Sound biblical doctrine, persistent prayer, and godliness in all our thoughts, words, and deeds
   - Methods — Wise, biblical, and culturally-appropriate methods which bear spiritual fruit

2. **EMPOWERING PARTNERSHIPS** An excellent short-term mission establishes healthy, inter-dependent, on-going relationships between sending and receiving partners, and is expressed by:
   - Primary focus on intended receptors
   - Plans which benefit all participants
   - Mutual trust and accountability

3. **MUTUAL DESIGN** An excellent short-term mission collaboratively plans each specific outreach for the benefit of all participants, and is expressed by:
   - On-field methods and activities aligned to long-term strategies of the partnership
   - Goer-guests' ability to implement their part of the plan
   - Host receivers' ability to implement their part of the plan

4. **COMPREHENSIVE ADMINISTRATION** An excellent short-term mission exhibits integrity through reliable set-up and thorough administration for all participants, and is expressed by:
   - Truthfulness in promotion, finances, and reporting results
   - Appropriate risk management
   - Quality program delivery and support logistics

5. **QUALIFIED LEADERSHIP** An excellent short-term mission screens, trains, and develops capable leadership for all participants, and is expressed by:
   - Character — Spiritually mature servant leadership
   - Skills — Prepared, competent, organized, and accountable leadership
   - Values — Empowering and equipping leadership

6. **APPROPRIATE TRAINING** An excellent short-term mission prepares and equips all participants for the mutually designed outreach, and is expressed by:
   - Biblical, appropriate, and timely training
   - On-going training and equipping (pre-field, on-field, post-field)
   - Qualified trainers

7. **THOROUGH FOLLOW THROUGH** An excellent short-term mission assures evaluation, debriefing and appropriate follow-through for all participants, and is expressed by:
   - Comprehensive debriefing of all participants (pre-field, on-field, post-field)
   - Thoughtful and appropriate follow-through for goer-guests
   - On-field and post-field evaluation among sending and receiving partners
Best Practices for Short-Term Mission Trips
by Laurie A. Occhipinti

There is no single “right” way to do a mission trip. What works depends very much on the goals of the congregations and participants, the strengths and concerns of the host community, and the context of each mission group and each trip. But after several years of talking to short-term mission participants, reading scholarly accounts of the short-term mission phenomenon, and going on mission trips myself, I have found that some conditions and practices seem to support better mission trips — ones that best contribute to alleviating conditions of poverty and to creating genuine relationships between communities.

Establish Long-Term Relationships

Although short-term mission is, by its very definition, limited in duration, it is most effective in the context of a long-term relationship. This can be achieved in a number of different ways — through a direct partnership between congregations or a sister-parish arrangement, by working with a faith-based or nongovernmental organization with a long-term presence in a community, or through one-time participation in a longer-term denominational program that links congregations globally. Even in the case of a natural disaster or other emergency, when a congregation may feel called to send aid and volunteers to a region in which it does not have any existing relationships, this aid is much more effective if it is offered through an existing organization with an established presence “on the ground.”

Choosing a location, going back repeatedly, and allowing a relationship to develop makes the biggest impact and has additional practical benefits as well. Working through a long-term partner helps to ensure a smooth experience for travelers and keeps surprises — and the stress of unanticipated circumstances — to a minimum. Visiting the same location repeatedly may also make the trip seem less like a tourist jaunt.

Reflecting on the Experience

Mission trips are more effective, in a host of different ways, when participants are engaged in examining the purpose of their experience not just during the trip but also before and after the trip. Orientation and debriefing can help to provide participants with a space to reflect on their personal and spiritual development, the meanings that the experience carries for them, and a sense that their involvement in a mission trip can enrich their “ordinary” life. The opportunity to contextualize the short-term mission experience through reflection before and after an actual trip can be another incentive to conduct a short-term mission within a long-term partnership or stable relationship with a host community or organization.

Volunteer service is a manifestation of compassion and an act of concern for others, and a way to learn and grow.

Projects that Make a Difference

Channeling service through effective development projects, ones that have proven themselves to make a difference in the lives of people who are economically

disadvantaged, puts the time and resources of short-term mission to their best use. The best projects begin with planners seeking out and listening to the opinions of host partners. Good projects also happen when planners shift as much control as possible to individuals and groups in the host community. They build on strengths — the strengths of the host community, the skills and talents of volunteer participants, and the resources that are available. Focusing on strengths and available resources shifts the ways in which participants think about a “poor” community, pointing out its advantages rather than simply its deficits. It also can make projects more sustainable if they are less reliant on outside support. In order to be most effective, outside groups examine charity, development, and social justice and work toward creating projects that address the causes and not just the symptoms.

Understanding the Role of Culture

Culture is not just the clothes one wears or the music one listens to, but it refers to more fundamental patterns of thought and behavior through which people understand the world and one another. Short-term mission explicitly creates a framework for interaction between people from different cultures. But participants have a tendency to collapse cultural difference, seeing “the poor” as interchangeable or as homogeneous. This tendency is an obstacle to cultural understanding as well as a barrier to the creation of authentic relationship across cultures. Discussing culture and cultural difference is one tool to avoid this pitfall. Investing time to learn about the political, historical, and economic context of the host culture provides participants with a better understanding of the significance of the work they do. Learning the language of the host culture, even at a rudimentary level, can lower barriers and facilitates more interaction.

Making a Difference

Short-term mission, at its best, is a way of recognizing and appreciating human dignity. Through service, participants find new meaning in their own lives and reflect on their relationships with others. Through the encounter with poverty, they experience the effects of social injustice and inequality. Through developing relationships, they learn the stories of others and gain a perspective on our shared humanity. Their volunteer service is a manifestation of compassion and an act of concern for others, and a way to learn and grow. It has the potential to transform not just those who are served, but also those who serve, in ways that can make a genuine difference in the world.

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Eight Reasons I was Wrong About Short Term Mission Trips
by Rich Birch

I used to think short term mission trips were a complete waste of resources and a distraction from our church’s core mission. They basically amounted to “petting the poor” or “poverty tourism.” But my attitude changed after having the privilege of leading a short term trip with Living Water International. It helped me appreciate the ways short term mission experiences can be an important part of a church’s discipleship strategy.

Creating awareness of the universal human experience

Mission trip participants are reminded that people are people. Whether they are across the street or around the world, people have the same needs. They want to know and be known. And they need Jesus. Participants come home from mission trips more mindful of the need to care for the people in their own community.

Understanding the challenges of serving in other cultures

There are unique challenges to serving in every community and culture. It’s one thing to talk about those challenges. It’s entirely different to get up close and see those challenges first hand. Being informed at this level gives trip participants the ability to be more informed advocates when they return home.

Assuming the roles of learner, servant, and helper

Often mission trip participants have a job where they are the expert or teacher or leader. Mission trips are a gift to these people because they provide the opportunity to be in the role of learner or servant or helper. Jesus said that we’re called be to the “servant of all,” and these trips give people the opportunity to actually do that.

Becoming more generous

Can I be honest for a minute? For those from rich northern countries traveling to developing southern countries, the next best step following a short term mission trip is becoming a donor and advocate. The biggest way we can provide long-term “help” is to go home and figure out how to restructure our lives to be more generous. Seeing the needs first hand generates a depth of knowledge and empathy that no amount of spreadsheets, emotional videos, or glossy photos can generate. People get informed and motivated. And they become smarter and more generous with their financial resources.

Gaining clarity on our economic status

This is related to people becoming more generous, but it’s more personal. A well-executed short term mission trip makes people aware of the fact that they are among...
the rich minority in the world. Some people end up experiencing this as guilt, which can be a good start. But ultimately the hope is to move people beyond feeling bad to the place where they feel thankful that they have the opportunity to steward the resources God has given them.

**Depending on God, maybe for the first time**

Our culture is structured to be predictable, safe, and comfortable. It often removes the chance for people to be dependent on God because there is little opportunity for stuff to go wrong. Short term mission trips move people out of their comfort zones and force them to face the fact that they aren’t in control … maybe for the first time in their lives. This can give people greater clarity on their place in the universe and helps to reset their relationship with Jesus.

**Getting people out of their seats**

A core part of engaging the people in our church is to get them out of their seats and engaged in the mission. These trips are a chance for people to serve, to give back, and to be part of what God is doing. This draws them in closer and helps them get more connected with their church.

**Seeing with new eyes**

While it isn’t always polite or comfortable to name this reality, people traveling on short term mission trips often are a part of wealthy, dominant cultures. They are traveling to poorer countries and often being led by incredibly talented people who look totally different from them, often people who would be part of the “minority” culture in our country. I love the impact this can have on people as they see others from various cultures in a different light than is often portrayed by the dominant culture at home. 

Rich Birch serves as operations pastor at Liquid Church in New Jersey. This material is adapted from a recent post that appeared on his blog “unSeminary” at unseminary.com and used by permission.