

Two Awesome Problems

# How Short-Term Missions Can Go Wrong

by Glenn Schwartz

**A** burgeoning interest in Christian missions has produced a new interest in short-term service. This has resulted in thousands of short-termers going out across the world, some under the direction of the Holy Spirit, some for their own benefit (as on a glorified vacation), but all, hopefully, for the benefit of those they seek to serve. Peterson, Aeschliman and Sneed in their book *Maximum Impact Short-Term Mission* (STEMPress: Minneapolis, 2003) say there are now at least one million going out each year into short-term mission service (p. 243).

For the purpose of this article, I have divided short-term missions into two categories: 1) *short visits of two to six weeks* by those taking a “working vacation” (or holiday); and 2) *longer visits of six months to two or three years*. Longer STMs (Short Term Missions) are most often taken by young volunteers, professionals on sabbatical, or retired persons willing to give a year or two of service. However, the major emphasis of this article will be on the shorter visits of two to six weeks.

The effectiveness of short-term missions has been written about in various missionary publications in recent years. (A brief list of books and web sites appears in the bibliography of this article.) The main purpose of this article is to deal with something that one does not see addressed in any of the books I have read on short-term missions. I am referring to the relationship between short-term service and the possibility of creating unhealthy dependency on outside people and funding. In this article I will make various suggestions regarding how to avoid dependency on short-term mission trips. Included among these will be suggestions regarding sound cross-cultural practice.

At the outset, *I wish to emphasize that short-term workers can have a positive experience and at the same time make a positive impact on the community to which they go.* The fact that, too often, short-termers have counterproductive experiences or are ineffective, is my reason for drawing attention to the subject.

## *What Happens When Good Will Turns to Ill Feeling?*

My first encounter with short-term missions was in Central Africa in 1961.<sup>1</sup> While there I learned about a North American program created to send

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university students on a six-week visit to Africa to assist in humanitarian projects with the purpose of “building goodwill between the youth of two nations.”

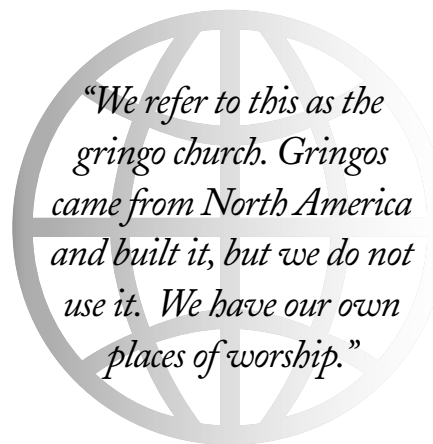
As part of this program a group of Americans and Canadians came to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) where I lived and worked. About four weeks into their six-week visit the group suddenly left. I heard about their premature departure and went to the building site to ask what happened. Since they were from North America, I thought it was good to learn why they left early. The local builder in charge of the project gave the following explanation:

What the Americans didn't know is that we here in Africa also know how to build buildings. It isn't that they didn't work hard. The trowel was too slow to put mortar between the bricks, so they used their bare hands to speed things up. But they must remember that we built buildings before they came, and we will build buildings after they leave. Unfortunately, while they were here, they thought they were the only ones who knew how to build buildings. Finally things got so bad, we had to ask them to leave.

Obviously this short-term mission was counter-productive to “building goodwill between the youth of two nations.” Ironically, when I visited the site some months later after the building was complete, there was a bronze plaque beside the entrance saying, “This building was built by the youth of Southern Rhodesia, the United States and Canada to foster goodwill between the nations.” Sadly, it had turned out to fall short of its goal.

In a *second* incident, a group of North Americans helped to build a school building in West Africa. A local church in West Africa accepted their offer to provide manual labor from North America in order to complete the project. The Americans moved in and worked daily under the direction of one of their own members—a building contractor from North America who accompanied them. In situations such as this, the local builder in charge of the project usually steps back while the “experienced” North American directs the work.

When the Americans left, they had a good feeling of “what we did for them.” And truly a building was left behind. Some time later, I interviewed several of the Americans who participated in that short-term project. It was not surprising that some of them looked back with a rather dubious feeling about their contribution. One was so embarrassed about the arrogance the short-termers displayed that the suggestion of another mission trip to build another building (this time in Asia) seemed almost repulsive. Indeed, thankfully not all short-term efforts are like this. The challenge is to avoid the “great white outsider” syndrome.



A *third* incident involved a church building erected in a rural part of Ecuador by well-meaning North Americans. On one occasion a group of short-termers saw the well-built building and asked about it. Local people said, “We refer to this as the *gringo* church. Gringos came from North America and built it, but we do not use it. We have our own places of worship.” This building was the result of the efforts of well-meaning but misguided outsiders.

A *fourth* incident occurred in Guyana, South America. A missionary told how he had taken a group of young people from North America to Guyana to build a church building. After three weeks of dedicated effort, the building was at last completed and presented to the local people. The North Americans returned home convinced that they had made a good contribution to needy people. Two years later the missionary, now back in the USA, got a letter from the people in Guyana. It read,

“The roof on *your* church building is leaking. Please come and fix it.” The importance of this is well understood by those who are familiar with issues of “ownership.”<sup>2</sup>

A *fifth* incident occurred in West Africa where a short-termer was working in a two-year assignment. She served in an area where a medical doctor—turned church planter—was trying to get a local congregation to increase their awareness of missions and evangelism. He was elated when the pastor reported that their annual missions conference increased the total offering from forty-five dollars last year to sixty-one dollars this year. It was truly a time for rejoicing. The congregation even began to plant a new church some kilometers away. As the short-termer was about to leave, she took pity on the congregation and gave them what amounted to her life savings—six thousand eight hundred dollars—to build a new church building. Imagine, the impact of that sum of money thrust into a situation like I just described. The result was that the pastor simply began to ask where he could find more of that kind of money. One can only feel compassion for the missionary who had been teaching principles of self-support. He saw his efforts at raising awareness about the importance of local resources go down the drain. Unfortunately many short-termers have no idea of the impact that kind of giving has on those they try to help.

### Is it Really that Bad?

By now you have probably concluded that these five illustrations represent a bleak picture of short-term mission efforts. Lest this cast an aspersion on all short-term mission trips, I suggest that we rather compare these negative experiences with sound missionary practices which lead to the planting of healthy, sustainable churches in cross-cultural situations. Allow me to illustrate in the following way.

Missionaries have successfully planted churches cross-culturally in many parts of the world where they earned the right to be heard. This has come to be known in missionary circles as “incarnation.” Those

## **A** *t the end of their time in Indonesia, Christians and Muslims came together in a local church to thank them and bid them farewell*

missionaries learned local languages without expecting the people to whom they ministered to learn their language. They paid attention to the cultural elements to which the Gospel would need to speak. They exercised creative listening in order to be heard when they did eventually decide it was time to speak.<sup>3</sup>

And what was the result? In some places, people movements to Christ followed.<sup>4</sup> This meant that significant numbers of people came to Christ and whole societies were changed. This kind of cross-cultural evangelization will hardly occur when the time frame is a two or three-week visit into and out of a society, with little knowledge or understanding of local language and culture. Short-term missionaries will hardly have opportunity to experience a people movement because, like many missionaries, they don't know what one is or how it works.

And what about a positive short-term experience? Some programs such as YWAM (Youth With A Mission) and YES (Youth Evangelism Service—a Mennonite sponsored program) have demonstrated that there IS a wholesome way to prepare for short-term missions. Both programs require in-depth discipleship training, sometimes as much as three months or more. One young woman having gone through such training, went to Indonesia several years ago when Christian/Muslim conflicts were very much in the news. The group she was with spent their time in prayer and intercession, relating to local people and learning as much Indonesian language as they could. They played with children orphaned in the religious conflict, taught English and had discussions with local teenagers, taxi drivers and even Muslim clerics. They were so well accepted that Muslim leaders invited them to teach English classes in the mosque! At the end of their time in Indonesia, *Christians and Muslims came together in a local*

*church to thank them and bid them farewell*—so great was the respect for those young people and what they had contributed to the community! This could hardly have been done in a two-week period and especially without the kind of cultural sensitivity they learned during their training.

Before sending out His disciples on a short-term ministry assignment, Jesus told them, “Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16b). Short-termers and long-term missionaries alike would do well to remember these words when venturing into cross-cultural ministry. Both will find that listening, learning and “being” are essential to an effective ministry.

### ***The Alternative Demonstrated by YWAM and the Mennonites***

Some time ago I was asked who is doing short-term missions right. I wish I had been quicker to respond and tell about the YWAM-DTS program and the Mennonite YES program to which I referred earlier. The following are some of the strengths of these programs:

- In both programs the participants are given a serious introduction to cross-cultural issues. This includes information on how people in other religions think and worship.
- They include training in spiritual warfare, something the average westerner often knows little or nothing about.
- The training also raises awareness about how we as Americans are viewed in the eyes of the rest of the world.
- Participants are forced to examine themselves as individuals, including personal strengths and weaknesses. This means learning to understand not just themselves, but also others on the team with whom they will serve. By the time such young people reach the point of minis-

try, they have had some of their potential personal problems nipped in the bud.

If anyone wants to give young people a wholesome cross-cultural experience in short-term missions, this kind of training is essential.

### ***Why do Negative Experiences Occur in Short-Term Missions?***

Obviously the purpose of short-term mission trips is to provide a positive spiritual experience for both the givers and the receivers. In the above examples, applying a few simple rules to the training of short-termers could well have changed a negative experience into a positive one. Unless appropriate training is given, more and more short-termers will have less than satisfactory experiences for themselves and those they try to help.

*First*, in the preparation of short-termers, the anticipation of “doing good” for someone else is frequently overplayed. Americans are to be commended for their willingness to help those whom they perceive to be in need. Our worldview includes a substantial portion of charitable or philanthropic concern. Some of it is driven by the benefit of a tax-deductible receipt, some by a spirit of adventure, but much of it is genuine compassion. “Doing” (what we accomplish) is often in conflict with the importance of “being” (who we are). This important distinction could well be at the root of the problem. Someone once referred to such people as “human doings,” rather than “human beings.”

The importance of *doing* may be inspired by the need to report “what we have done.” It is hard to raise support—even for short-term missions—based on *being*. Yet there is something about our witness which is greatly enhanced when people see us for who we are, rather than for what we do. In the book *Mack & Leeann's Guide to Short-Term Missions* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 2000, pgs 72–76), there is an illustration of a group of young people who went to Kenya on a short-term mission. One of the young women was assigned to work in the home of a church leader in which the wife was about to deliver

a child. The young woman found herself doing laundry, preparing meals and cleaning the house. She wondered how she would ever report this menial type work to those back home who gave financial support to help her get there. When all was said and done, however, expressions of gratitude by the local people proved that her servant attitude was worth it all. In this case, “being” spoke louder than “doing.” Her willingness to serve left a lasting positive impression on the local people.

Imagine how we in America would feel if people from another country—like Germany or Korea—came to our church and took over our Summer Vacation Bible School, asking us to serve as their interpreters because they did not speak our language. What if the illustrations they gave our children about how to live were, for the most part, culturally irrelevant? And how would we feel if while these “foreigners” were with us, they dominated our schedule and made it difficult for us to get our work done. Sadly, this is often the impact of poorly planned short-term mission trips.

Frequently short-termers go out with an air of superiority because of the assumptions which we as westerners hold. We assume that short-termers have something important to say to the rest of the world, even if they are young and inexperienced, compared to those among whom they go to serve. In some places where short-termers go, the Church has been in existence for decades (maybe a century or more) before short-termers arrive on the scene. Our judgment of the local people may be affected by our need as westerners for a certain standard of cleanliness or adequacy of shelter—based on what we feel is appropriate. Those we are trying to serve may not share those same felt needs. Little wonder that sometimes outsiders are often either envied for their wealth, or resented for their cultural insensitivity.

*Second*, the attitude that an “outsider” can do the job better than “local people” is often at the heart of how we as westerners view ourselves.

**F***requently, dependent churches are living in the midst of resources which are adequate, not only for themselves, but for the work God is calling them to do.*

Take away our sense of superiority and you cut at the very heart of who we think we are and why we believe we exist. This kind of arrogance has enormous implications, not only for the Christian movement, but also in international affairs. It should not be surprising that such attitudes can lead to the negative feelings many non-westerners have toward us as Americans. A sense of superiority has been instilled in us since the day we learned to speak English. Our songs, sermons, educational system and political speeches all reinforce this idea. To say that such assumptions are deeply ingrained in us would be an understatement.

What are the implications of this air of superiority for those involved in cross-cultural missions? Perhaps those who fly airplanes into tall towers are trying to tell us something about how the rest of the world sees us. The scripture is clear that as God’s people, we are to demonstrate a broken spirit and a contrite heart. The rest of the world may be trying to show us that our arrogance is not compatible with the Christianity we profess.

A *third* reason for the often-negative aspects of short-term missions is that westerners often give the impression that our wealth is the secret to helping people come into right relationship with God. I have written extensively on this subject in other places. I will deal with this more in the suggestions given later in this article. While this is not the place to deal in depth with issues related to finance, suffice it to say that unless we learn to recognize who is truly poor, and how to help appropriately, the danger is that misunderstanding will arise and an otherwise good short-term experience will have negative consequences.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that someone must help with the tremendous needs of a hungry, hurting and dying world.<sup>6</sup>

Our challenge is to find a way to help that does not leave others with the impression they are too weak, too helpless and too uninformed to help themselves. Frequently, dependent churches are living in the midst of resources which are adequate, not only for themselves, but for the work God is calling them to do.

A *fourth* reason behind negative short-term mission experiences relates to the matter of ownership. Too often, outsiders unwittingly become “owners” of the projects on which they work. I once had a conversation with a group of short-termers and posed the question, “Whose project is this that you are working on in [South Africa]?” The answer I got was revealing. “Oh, we let the local people help us with the project.” It is this spirit which is behind the statement I made earlier—“the roof on *your* church building is leaking.”

A *fifth* reason for negative short-term experiences is that short-termers most likely have inadequate training for the complex task of communicating the Gospel cross-culturally. In the video series entitled *Vision for the Nations*, Dr. Lloyd Kwast gives the following different aspects that are important in cross-cultural communication:<sup>7</sup> oral, written, pictorial, kinesics (body movement), audio, silence, artifactual, touch, optical, spatial, time, olfactory (smell) and oculosics (eye contact). What chance do most short-termers have of knowing the importance of these factors in cross-cultural communication? Little wonder that those in whose culture we find ourselves are often offended by the kinds of things we do. Unfortunately, most of them are too kind to tell us of the many ways we break the rules, even as we are trying to communicate something as important as the love of God.

## ***An Alternative Demonstrated by a Civic Organization***

Western Christians could learn something from international civic organizations. Several years ago I attended a meeting of a local civic club. The speaker of the evening gave a slide presentation on his six-week trip to India in a “youth” exchange program. (He was a “youth” of 35 years of age, and an owner of a substantial farming operation in the United States.)

Several things impressed me as he spoke. First, he did not say one negative word about the culture of India or how things were done there. He did not talk about how terrible the food was or how unsanitary the conditions were. Rather, he spoke positively about visits to factories, farms, and communities and about the hospitality he received in the homes of host families. As he spoke, I asked myself how a secular organization could send out half a dozen Americans who would come back with such a positive experience and wholesome report?

### ***How did the Civic Organization Pull it Off?***

*First*, this group went specifically to learn. They were not expected to tell how it was done in America. They were told to learn how things were done in India.

*Second*, they were not isolated on Western style mission stations or in Western hotels from which they could look down on the culture from a high-rise building. They lived humbly and with gratitude in homes of their Indian hosts.

*Third*, their orientation before leaving for India prepared them to be learners. It must have been refreshing for the people of India to entertain Americans who had left their air of superiority at home.

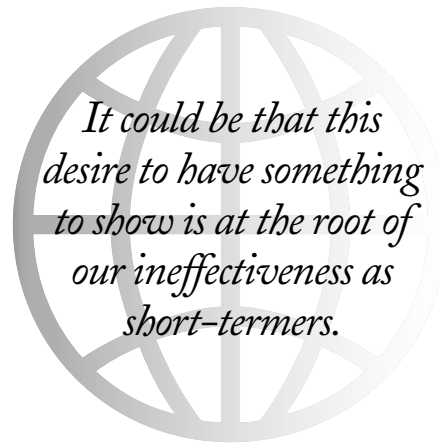
One wishes that short-term mission groups could learn a similar kind of humility. It would be helpful if we, as westerners, came to realize that our ideas are most acceptable to others when we are most accepting of theirs. The Christian missionary movement

would do well to take this to heart in relation to both short-term and long-term missions.

### ***Suggestions for Those Doing Training for Short-Term Mission Projects***

The following list of suggestions is not by any means exhaustive. In a short article such as this, one can only begin to scratch the surface. However, with short-termers, one at least needs to begin with the basics, which is what I am trying to do here.

1. Anyone promoting short-term mission projects should make it clear that those going to serve



are learners. It is one place where on-the-job-learning is legitimate. This is especially true where there is little or no cross-cultural training provided beforehand.

One of the more disturbing trends in short-term missions today is the anti-intellectual attitude that “simply going” is the important thing. This is shown in the following statement from one of the books on short-term missions:

For every additional hour required of preparation, for every additional characteristic demanded of our recruits, there will be thousands—perhaps millions—who remain sidelined as too average, too real, too foolish to that particular expression of “Missio Dei.” In our feeble attempts to birth a missionary without spot or blemish, the world continues going to hell without Jesus Christ. (Peterson, Aeschilman and Sneed, p. 29)

2. Short-termers—especially those without cross-cultural training—should be told that they are *guests, not specialists*. Short-termers often go to places where the Gospel has been preached for decades—and sometimes centuries. In such places young people should not be given the impression that they are taking the Gospel there for the first time. One complicating factor is that those paying for the trip want to know that the Gospel is being preached. In reality, the short-termers may find themselves “preaching the gospel” to mature leaders in the church who themselves are capable of being trainers—if the visitors were in the frame of mind to be learners.
3. Short-termers should be made aware of the dangers of simplistic answers to complex cultural issues. How can one who has never lived in or studied a culture know how to respond to complicated issues such as work ethics, marriage customs, or elements of faith where religion is characterized by incredibly delicate and complex issues? How can one speak about the Good News of the Gospel to animists unless he or she is familiar with the basic tenants of animism? I speak from experience, because I went to serve among animists in the early 1960s without any understanding of what an animistic worldview is. Chances are slim to none that short-termers will be familiar with such issues in another culture. When one begins to understand and appreciate the complexity of someone else’s worldview, it becomes unthinkable to argue against the need for training cross-cultural workers as suggested in the quote above. If a young person came to his pastor and said, “I think God is calling me to be a medical doctor”, would anyone in his right mind say, “Just, go for it; you don’t need medical training. As long as you are called and sincere, go

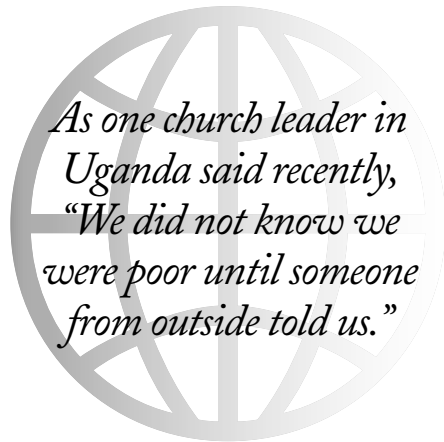
practice medicine.” Yet he or she may be a sincere person!

Much of the dependency we see in churches around the world is the result of well-meaning people who went out to serve without so much as a basic knowledge of the indigenous principle—including the fact that churches can be self-supporting from the very beginning. There are plenty of examples to show that this is possible.

4. Short-termers should be reminded that their own testimony has validity but also that it should be shared discreetly. They should be reminded that their own testimony is not necessarily normative for the rest of world. People in many parts of the world simply do not come to the Lord the way many North Americans do. What might be more important than giving one’s own testimony would be to listen to the testimonies of the people to whom the short-termers go. Being willing to listen could communicate that we as westerners can actually listen as well as speak.
5. Short-termers should be told that *who they are* is far more important than *what they do*. (This is good advice for long-term missionaries as well.) The problem is that many times short-termers feel they must justify going so many miles and using so many dollars by having something tangible to show for it—like a finished building or a show of hands after an evangelistic event. It could be that this *desire to have something to show* is at the root of our ineffectiveness as short-termers. It is why learners, with the right attitude, might actually accomplish more than activists who must leave something visible behind.
6. Short-termers who feel that they must have something to show for the time and money spent might consider other alternatives. For example, it is much cheaper (though maybe not as glamorous) to have a cross-

cultural experience in an inner city in North America. There are cities where non-English languages abound. Even here, it is important that one go with the attitude of a learner.

Remember, it is much cheaper to go to an inner city in one’s home country than to travel overseas. It is also possible in a nearby North American urban setting to develop a long-term relationship and not just to make a foray in and out, never to go there again. One can even learn a foreign language by associating with those in an inner city. This kind of experience is an ideal



proving ground for those thinking of long-term cross-cultural service. If one survives an inner city experience and enjoys it, that is a good sign that long-term cross-cultural service might be rewarding and effective.

7. Every short-termer should be reminded of the difficulty posed by our relative wealth compared to that of the people whom we visit. One of the temptations of short-termers is to become overwhelmed by what appears to be poverty when looking at the rest of the world from our perspective. Here it is helpful to distinguish between *absolute* and *relative* poverty. People living in *absolute* poverty most likely will need outside assistance or they will not survive. This help may need to be given in the form of medicine, food, shelter or the

like. *Relative poverty*—the kind many short-termers encounter—means that people may not be as well off as we are, but they are quite capable of surviving in the society and surroundings where God has placed them. Those who live in relative poverty are often susceptible to the kind of dependency we should all seek to avoid.<sup>8</sup> It is easy to give people the impression that since their houses or church buildings are not as good as ours, they need financial assistance for an upgrade. When outsiders give that impression to the person living in relative poverty, local people may begin to long for something they did not know was a need. As one church leader in Uganda said recently, “We did not know we were poor until someone from the outside told us.”

Short-termers should be reminded that their compassion must not result in doing for others what they can and should do for themselves. Sometimes the difficulty is knowing where the line is drawn between absolute and relative poverty. Leaders of short-term mission groups would do well to reflect on issues such as this before undertaking a short-term trip.

8. Short-termers should be told that a good learner will not only listen to those in the community where they are visiting, but they will seek to learn about the place they are going. Reading *Operation World* or some other book about the country or local communities will give the short-termer an appreciation of what they will encounter. It has often been said that the longer an outsider stays in one place, the more he realizes how little he understands. This often doesn’t dawn on short-termers because time is so short; they feel they must to act, whether their actions are wise or not.

Another area of required reading for every short-termer relates to cross-cultural communica-

tion. Here is where the skills of a good learner can be developed. Every short-termer should be required to read a small book by Drs. Tom and Betty Sue Brewster entitled *Bonding and the Missionary Task: Establishing A Sense of Belonging*.<sup>9</sup> Everyone considering cross-cultural service—long-term or short-term—should read and digest the contents of this little book.

9. A second way to get good training for short-terminers, especially the leaders of short-term missions, is to take the course *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*.<sup>10</sup> The course has been revolutionary in introducing the missionary heart of God to those interested in serving Him wholeheartedly. Among other things, there are lessons on cultural and Biblical issues that will help to better inform those leading short-term missions.

10. Be careful to check the motives for a short-term mission trip. The following notice in a church bulletin shows how questionable motives can sometimes be.

(Our congregation) is sponsoring a women's only mission trip to beautiful Guadalajara, Mexico! We'll spend the week of June 11–18 in Guadalajara (also known as the shopping capital of Mexico!), where we will have the incredible opportunity to minister to, pray for, and teach women in a vibrant church community. And this trip isn't a "rough-roach-in-your-bed" kind of experience either—we'll be housed in nice clean hotel rooms, eat lots of salsa, and have plenty of time to shop! Our hope is to take at least fifteen women (including teenage daughters) on this Mexican Ministry Outreach... we trust that God will expand our hearts for Him as He expands our ministry to the women of Guadalajara. If you're remotely interested in this great commission adventure—or if you're just in the mood for Mexico after all this winter weather—call for more details about this fantastic outreach opportunity.

How do we expect to get the right people and engage in

appropriate ministry when the benefits are portrayed in this way? Thankfully, there is an alternative. It is to encourage such a group of women to go as learners, not teachers (and especially not as shoppers). They can be told that they are going primarily to listen and learn. They should be told that living among the people, might not be so bad after all. And what if they did experience a roach or two? It might give them a little appreciation for how the other half of the world lives.

11. Whenever possible, keep short-term mission groups small. Imagine the impact when a large group of outsiders descends on a small community or congregation. Their presence is obvious, potentially disruptive and can easily cause embarrassment. Smaller groups are easier to place in homes. They are easier to talk to. They are less likely to stand out like the proverbial sore

thumb in a community. In terms of a work team, a small group is less likely to outnumber the local volunteers who should retain ownership of their own project.

12. One ideal way to look at the size of the group is to consider a team small enough to be easily accommodated in the homes of local people. They will be guests in homes, rather than a large group that needs special catering. By all means, do not take along someone who will do the cooking for the group. Also, let the building project be in the hands of the local builder, not one imported from the outside.

### Conclusion

There are many good reasons to consider short-term mission trips. When done well, short-term missions can be a blessing to those in both the sending and receiving societies. However, in order for the experience to be beneficial for both sides, it is necessary to build into the process the right

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attitude from the very beginning. This right attitude, coupled with good training in cultural sensitivity, could well turn an otherwise negative experience into one that is positive. When done right, a servant-attitude may develop which will turn some short-termers into life-long missionaries or life-long supporters of missions. Doing it right from the beginning is worth all the effort it takes.

*Note:* I welcome interaction with anyone who would like to discuss issues raised in this paper. I can be contacted at the following address:

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- Web Sites:* There are many web sites that have information on short term-missions. I recommend putting the term "short-term missions" into a search engine such as Google and you will find many web sites related to the subject. The

following are only a beginning of what is available:

www.shorttermmissions.com  
www.missionfinder.org/  
summer.htm  
www.experiencemission.org

For articles on issues of dependency and self-reliance among mission-established institutions see the website for World Mission Associates: www.wmausa.org.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I was there on a two-year short-term program with my denomination—the *Brethren in Christ Church*. I later returned to serve in Central Africa as a full-time missionary for another five and a half years.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on ownership and other issues related to dependency, see Lesson One of the eight-hour video series produced by World Mission Associates. It can be ordered on the World Wide Web at www.wmausa.org.

<sup>3</sup> By contrast, short-termers must speak within the short period they have whether they have done any listening or learning.

<sup>4</sup> For those who are interested in what a "people movement" is I recommend two sources, among many others. One is a book called *People Movements of Southern Polynesia* by Alan R. Tippett. Chapter 7 particularly gives the rationale for a people movement and how it works. The other resource is the video produced by New Tribes Mission entitled *EE Tarwo* which shows how seriously one missionary in New Guinea studied the language and culture before inviting people to make a decision to become believers. The people movement that followed was dramatic. Short of a miracle, discipling a people group this thoroughly can hardly be done during one two-week short-term mission trip.

<sup>5</sup> There are about seventy articles on this and related issues on our web site www.wmausa.org. Regarding who are actually poor, I recommend an article on our web site entitled *Searching for a Meaningful Way to Help the Poor*. See also, *Missions and Money* by Jonathan Bonk, listed in the bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> I am currently developing the idea that the ideal place to get help for needy people is the Church—a local church healthy and functioning in the com-

munities of the world which are in need. This means that many times the best help can be found among believers right in the communities where the need exists. Unfortunately, too often outsiders do not recognize the importance of resources within arm's reach of those local believers. For more on this subject, look for the paper entitled *I Believe in the Church* on the WMA web site or request it from the office of World Mission Associates. It should be available in early 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Every short-term team should be required to watch the video series *Vision for the Nations* before they are allowed to set foot on an airplane for cross-cultural service. It is available through the William Carey Library at www.perspectives.org.

<sup>8</sup> Even when trying to help those in absolute poverty, care must be taken so that long-term dependency does not develop. For further information on this, see the article entitled *Searching for a Meaningful way to help the Poor* on the WMA web site.

<sup>9</sup> It is published by Lingua House (1982) and is available from Academic Publications Summer Institute of Linguistics, 7500 West Camp Wisdom Road, Dallas, Texas 75236.

<sup>10</sup> Information on this course is available through the US Center for World Mission in Pasadena, California. Simply visit their web site www.perspectives.org, and the times and locations of courses will be available. In the year 2003 five thousand people enrolled in Perspectives courses across North America.



John Piper is for short-term missions, most of the time. If somebody doesn't want you to come and they don't have a plan for how it advances their mission, then, good grief, don't take a vacation, grab your eighteen teenagers, and go make some missionary's life miserable. Rather, talk to the missionaries. Work out a plan. And if they want you to come, then come. That way it should work out both ways. If older people, or young people, or multi-generational teams are really serving, pouring themselves out according to the needs of the missionary, then it's the best of both worlds. For one, though it may not feel like the fun a Those who went with a short-term mission team have seen some of the difficulties that missionaries experience on the field (though certainly not all). These people also have a greater desire to financially support the mission outreach of their church. If handled well, those returning from the trip can see that their financial contribution, no matter how small, can make a difference. Many of the pros can be turned into cons because of a wrong attitude. Conversely, the cons don't need to exist if you will put the focus where it needs to be. When planning your short-term mission trip, try to address each of these 10 points and find a way you can make your trip into a spiritual victory that advances the cause of missions for many years to come.