

*Brethren in Christ World Missions hopes to help provide financial assistance for 60 youth and young adults who this summer are going on a cross-cultural mission team. The following article will not only give them helpful suggestions for their term of service, but will also help us understand what they may experience and help us know how to pray for them.*

**M**Y great aunt went to Africa as a missionary on a steamboat. Everybody in her generation who went overseas did it by boat. I guess that's the classic way to go. It almost seems like the biblical way to move out for mission work. Paul certainly did a lot of moving by boat. Even Jesus used boats to get around . . . and to preach from.

One thing about missions in the steamboat era: people went for a lifetime or not at all.

But today, for the most part, we fly to mission assignments. Almost any place on earth can be reached within a day or so by some kind of airplane. And air travel has opened up a new thing in missions: the short term. Now people can head overseas for two years, two months, or two weeks.

There were early skeptics. You can understand why some mission leaders worried about fielding a horde of sunshine soldiers that get in the way for the summer and then go AWOL for life from missions. Their fears have been allayed a great deal by the outstanding performance of most short-termers. And most of the people leaving the homeshores for a lifetime have been overseas before. So even the most staid and traditional mission organizations have

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# Make the most of your short term mission

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adapted from an article by Steve Hawthorne

realized that short terms are a great way to recruit new workers for the mission field.

But short-term workers are a new and sometimes underused resource to missions. For the most part, folks underestimate what can be done during a short-term experience. Here are five action points that almost anyone on any short-term mission can do to maximize his or her entire expedition.

## **Experience the culture of another people**

Guess who's shocking you with their culture? The people! Culture shock is really people shock. So don't hunker down and hide out in foxholes of American hotels to take cover from all the barrages of weird food, blaring traffic, and pestiferous kids. Get out of the trenches and love some people. If you withdraw from the people of the host culture, you might as well go home.

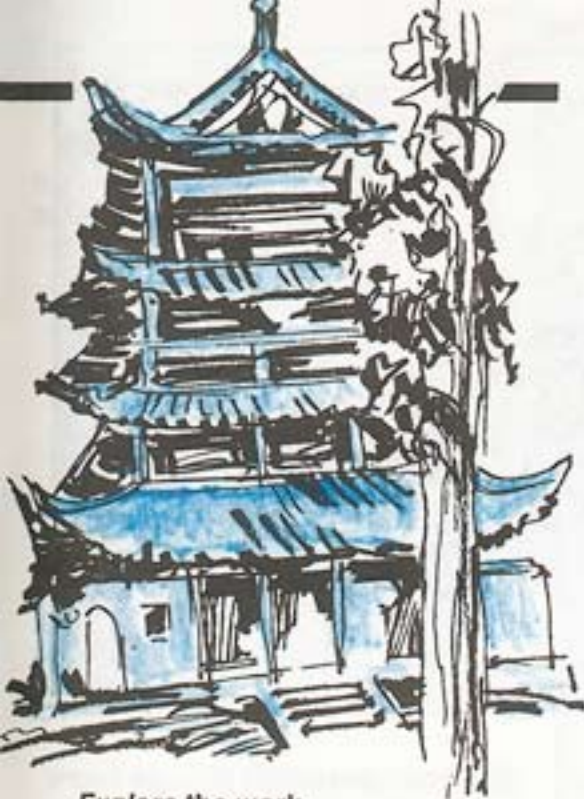
Make it your plan to get to know some of the people as well as you can. You'll be frustrated with the language barrier. (Welcome to missions.) But don't let it stop you from using whatever silly gimmicks you can to befriend someone in that culture. It simply isn't possible to experience the culture without relationships. It may cost you some pride and time, but don't fool yourself into thinking that you know what it's like overseas just because

you have physically been there. That's just plain old tourism.

Don't hide in the confines of the church. Often the Christians constitute a little subculture. Befriend a non-Christian. You might discover why there are so many of them. In the same way, get acquainted with a diversity of people and brackets of society.

Let me warn you about going relational. You probably won't be overseas long enough to experience classic culture shock, but it's a dangerous thing to truly begin to experience another culture. It sort of ruins you for the joy of profligate waste and the fun of unchecked individualism that we enjoy so much here at home. It can bother you to see how easily you forgot the weekly TV schedule. Having just the right kind of Toppers shoes or neckties the correct width becomes less important. And just for a moment, you can defy the gravity of your own culture and find yourself not caring if you ever top a hundred thousand dollars per year, or if you break a hundred thousand on the Ms. Pac-Man game. What matters most is God's glory in a world of people.

Cross-cultural experience helps you to put people over things, to value friendships over your own frustrations, to put your plans into God's hands. So I warn you. Watch out for true experience of other cultures. It will irrevocably change you.



### **Explore the work of the missionary**

Most short terms are designed to get you exposed to what being a missionary is really like. That suits many short-termers, because that's why they have come. It's kind of hard trying to imagine yourself being a missionary if you have never seen one in action.

Good luck watching missionaries. They are notoriously hard to view in action on the field actually doing missions labor. Instead of getting exposed to the *work* of the missionary, many short-termers get exposed to the *life* of the missionary.

So it's up to you to find out what these people really do. Inquire about their goals and how they know if they have reached them. Probe into their story, looking for the key factors of their success. Explore the non-Christian world; how do they perceive the missionary?

Make sure you understand why the missionary does what he or she does before you get too judgmental. But, actually, you don't have to evaluate. Simply aim at getting a vision of what the missionary is trying to do. Above all, pray with the missionaries to feel what is on their hearts.

### **Extend the work of the gospel**

Almost any short term will encourage you to experience the cul-

ture and explore the missionary career. But few missions will go beyond these and deliberately encourage you to do significant evangelism during your admittedly brief stay.

Everyone knows that you will change more than the country will. But develop some goals of furthering the gospel while there. Don't plan on impacting an entire city or country during your stint overseas. Try praying for one or two people to make radical steps toward God's kingdom while you are there. Team up with the missionaries or with nationals. There's a lot you can do without the language in many situations.

Your assignment may not be front-line communicator. There are many ways to serve and push the whole gospel movement forward. But don't be content just to babysit or type or fix cars or paint buildings, even if the main reason for your coming overseas was to serve in those ways. Press for a way and some time to be involved in communicating God's love with someone who doesn't know him.

### **Exchange insights, strengths, and love with national Christians**

Most short-termers eke out a certain modicum of bewildered respect for their national hosts. But a few break through their own shyness, busyness, or just plain prejudice, to interact with some of the finest disciples alive. These Christian leaders are often busier without showing it than you can imagine, so be careful with timing.

Don't talk so much. Listen. Express interest in hearing their story, and the story of their family. Tell a few stories from your own experience and pretty soon you'll be trading insights and truths that will truly stretch you. Pray with your national co-workers. Take advantage of any chance to watch them minister to their own people. Sharing like this will widen your discipleship like few other relationships.

Once again, let me warn you. Relationships like this could spoil

you for the fun of squabbling over the non-essentials of the gospel back home. When acquainted with other expressions of the gospel, you can begin to see more clearly what is wine and what is wineskin.

You will need to carefully select your mission for its goals, activities, and flexibility to do the best experiencing, exploring, and exchanging. But regardless of the team you work with, it's up to you to make the most of it.

### **Expose others to what God is doing**

It's commonly held that short terms are good "exposure" for would-be missionaries, so that they can get "exposed" to a cross-cultural environment.

I think that some short-term missionaries ought to be apprehended for indecent exposure. I'm talking about the lousy job some of us do in exposing our own homeside churches to the needs and opportunities in the places that short-termers have been. How can churches ever become wholeheartedly motivated for the Great Commission unless they are challenged by their own people? Who can do it better than the short-termer?

If short-term experiences get locked in personal diaries, they are lost as challenges to the church. Every short-termer should leave home prepared, not just to report the travelogue and say a dutiful thank you, but to agitate on the grass roots level in the church for greater commitment to missions in general, and specifically to the particular needs and people visited by the short-termer.

Maximize the potential of your short term. Stop treating it as if it were a private rite of passage. If you jump on a short term like a Disneyland ride and passively wait to get "exposed" and "experienced," don't be surprised if you are disappointed. Mission commitment doesn't happen like getting a suntan. Don't go if you aren't ready for your life to change. And if you go, make it a worldchanger. ■