

TEAM LEADER HANDBOOK



Lander, WY



Loveland, CO floods



Yukon River Flood, AK



Klamath, CA Roof Project

Photo by David Marunde

UNITED METHODIST VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION

WESTERN JURISDICTION



UMVIM WJ

2015 version/Updated 2019

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Team Leader Handbook

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Western Jurisdiction Version

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A Note about This Handbook

We have structured this handbook around the process of forming and sending a team. If you are a seasoned team leader, you might already be familiar with some of the material discussed early in the handbook. However, we have included information and tips we have received from team leaders and long-term individual volunteers. You will benefit from reading this handbook from start to finish. As always, if you have any questions about the process of forming or sending your team, please contact us.

Please note that while this handbook supplements training, it does not replace Team Leader Training coordinated through your annual conference or through the UMVIM, WJ office. As a team leader, you are still expected to attend one of these training sessions. Check our website for up-to-date Team Leader Trainings across the Jurisdiction.

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Introduction

What is UMVIM?

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) is the short-term mission arm of the United Methodist Church. Our volunteers are lay and clergy, young and old, with differing abilities, vocations, and at different phases in life. We come together through the United Methodist Church in order that all may offer their skills and talents for Christian service at home and abroad.

Our emphasis is upon matching persons with opportunities so that everyone may participate in mission. After all, mission is not only for those who live in the field full-time. God calls all Christians “to bring good news to the oppressed [and] to bind up the broken-hearted” (Isaiah 61:1). We believe that no matter who you are, no matter the level of your resources, no matter how big or small your church, God is calling you to mission.

UMVIM exists to connect you with mission projects, both in your backyard and across the globe. Within the United Methodist Church, UMVIM relates closely with annual conference UMVIM committees and the General Board of Global Ministries, all of which seek to serve as a source of information for potential volunteers.

What is Western Jurisdiction (WJ)?

In the United States, the United Methodist Church is divided into five geographical regions with the Western Jurisdiction is one of those five. UMVIM, WJ is a ministry of Western Jurisdiction that is responsible for facilitating short-term mission in the following annual conferences: California-Pacific, Desert Southwest, California-Nevada, Oregon-Idaho, Yellowstone, Pacific Northwest, the Alaska United Methodist Conference, and Rocky Mountain.

How We Work with Local Churches

UMVIM, WJ exists to help local churches fulfill the great commission by personifying Christian love in action. Our primary function is to connect churches with appropriate mission projects, both within the United States and abroad. We also provide training materials for churches and mission teams, and we exist as a resource for team leaders. Our website, www.umvimwj.com, offers information on the process of sending a team, potential project sites, and insurance information. In addition, the staff of UMVIM, WJ is knowledgeable on all aspects of short-term mission. Contact our office with any questions relating to your local church’s mission experience. If we cannot immediately answer your question, we will connect you with someone who can.

Best Practices

UMVIM, WJ considers the following six items Best Practices for UMVIM teams:

1. *Have a trained team leader through your annual conference or Western Jurisdiction UMVIM program.* Contact your Conference UMVIM Coordinator for more information on upcoming trainings. You can find your coordinator, as well as a listing of upcoming training events, on our website, www.umvimwj.com. This handbook is commonly used as the basis for the training, however simply reading this handbook does not take the place of attending team leader training.
2. *Comply with you Conferences Safe Churches (Safe Sanctuaries or Safe Gatherings) policy of your annual conference.* Each annual conference has a policy designed to make church programming safe and welcoming for children and vulnerable adults. It is your responsibility as the team leader to ensure that your annual conference's policy is observed during all parts of your mission experience by all members of your team. Check with your Conference UMVIM Coordinator for specific policies, requirements, and expectations related to Safe Churches/Child Protection Policies, background checks, and insurance prior to registration on the UMVIM, WJ website.

If your conference does not have a Safe Churches policy or you need one to review, you will find a general one in the Appendix of this handbook.

3. *Serve with an UMVIM project.* Though some mission teams that register and get insurance through UMVIM, WJ do serve with projects not directly related to UMVIM, WJ. Serving with an UMVIM project (that is, a project listed on our website) gives a layer of accountability often not possible otherwise. UMVIM projects have all been approved by area bishops, heads of church, or church officials; should the need arise; we are able to step in and address certain situations. These projects have also gone through an extensive application process.
4. *Register your team.* Registering with UMVIM, WJ allows us to assist your team in placement, maintain mission relationships with our projects, and intervene in the unlikely event of a dispute between your team and the project. Other benefits to registering a team is:
 - Assist with site choices and other team needs.
 - Assistance in finding additional team members or equipping a team for its work.
 - Assistance in telling a team's story to the conference when a team returns.
 - Access to the latest training materials regarding both team formation and the team's chosen site.
 - Access to the most up to date insurance information and the latest in team member forms.
 - Access to scholarship and other financial assistance.
 - Quick emergency assistance in the event of accident or other issue with a deployed team. (Note: we will never deny this emergency assistance but if we

know who you are and where you are, we can respond more efficiently and quickly.)

There is no fee to register your team.

If you are traveling internationally, it is important to register each team member with the US State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) as well. This is a free service that you can complete online at <https://step.state.gov>. It is highly encouraged for international travel should an emergency occur and the US State Department orders evacuations of American citizens.

5. *Take insurance through UMVIM, WJ.* There is a nominal fee for this service. Our insurance policy covers both accidents and illnesses that occur during the dates of your mission, including travel dates to and from your destination. We believe it is vital that all mission teams take out insurance before traveling. Traveling for mission purposes carries some inherent risk, and it is very important to plan for contingencies. We pray that your mission experience is free of any need for insurance, but sometimes it can mean the difference between a negligible medical bill and an overwhelmingly large one. A copy of the insurance policy is available from the UMVIM, WJ office and on the WJ website at www.umvimwj.com
6. *Spiritual Formation.* The mission opportunity does not simply begin and end with your travel dates. Embarking on a mission should encompass a spiritual journey for you and your team that requires prayer and devotion before, during, and after you travel. Attending local worship services where you are serving is both crucial to understanding the culture, and respectful to those you are visiting. Remember this is God's mission, and you have each agreed to be part of it. *A Mission Journey: A Handbook for Volunteers* by the General Board of Global Ministries, is a valuable resource for you and your team for every part of the mission. It is available through The Upper Room (www.upperroom.org) or Amazon.

What is a Team Leader?

A team leader is someone who has undergone UMVIM team leader training and serves as the "head missionary." There are as many leadership styles as there are mission volunteers, and there is no one set model for being a successful team leader. However, you choose to delegate your responsibilities, and however you choose to lead your team, your team must understand that above all, you are the leader. When conflicts arise on your team—and they inevitably will—it is vital that your decisions are respected. Safety requires that in difficult situations the team leader has the ultimate say. This does not mean that the team leader should function as a dictator. Rather, it means that the team respects the leader as the person ultimately in charge and functions accordingly.

Selecting a Mission Opportunity

The UMVIM, WJ office maintains an extensive mission opportunity list of domestic and international projects. These opportunities are updated as we receive information from individual project hosts and can be found on the UMVIMWJ website. These lists are organized by the following criteria:

International Mission Opportunity List:

- Country
- Name of contact person
- Ongoing types of service
- Priority Project, if applicable (attempting to complete within 2-3 years)

Domestic Mission Opportunity List:

- State
- Conference
- Organization's Name
- Other information

Choose an opportunity, or even a few, that you feel could be a good match of your team's skills and desired type of service, and call or email our office for contact information for information, especially for international teams. We will put you in touch with on-the-ground project hosts who have agreed to work with us and our volunteers.

Individual mission opportunities have different attributes, associated costs, and requirements. It is important for you to think through the implications of these attributes as you select the project. If you are selecting the project before you are selecting the team, be sure that the project is one that fits your experience level as a team leader. If this is your first experience leading an UMVIM team, you might look for a project with an on-the-ground coordinator to handle logistics, rather than trying to schedule housing, food, construction details, and the like on your own.

Some important issues to consider when choosing a project:

- *Size of your team:* How many volunteers can the project accommodate? It is important not to burden the host with too many (or too few!) volunteers.
- *Type of project:* Different churches have members with different skill sets, and different team leaders have different skills as well. Find a project that fits your interest and abilities. If you have prospective team members with a variety of skills, find a project with a variety of outlets for those skills. There are plenty of projects, for instance, that need volunteers to help with construction and Bible School.
- *Experience level of your team:* Is this a good project for first-time missionaries? How much work will you as the team leader have to do to coordinate the project (food, laundry, housing, etc.)? Is there an on-site coordinator to help your team accomplish its goals? Consider the physical capabilities and emotional maturity of your team as well.

- *Priority Projects:* From time to time, UMVIM, WJ sends out information about projects that have been deemed to be Priority Projects, whether due to disaster, urgent requests from church leaders, or other factors. Consider taking on one of these projects if the project's needs match your team's abilities. You can learn more about these projects through our Weekly Update; the signup form for this email is located on our website.
- *Other teams' experience:* If you are curious about how other teams have fared at certain projects, contact our office. We maintain an extensive database of all teams that have traveled under the auspices of UMVIM, WJ. We are happy to connect you with team leaders who have visited the projects in which you are interested so that you can learn more. You can also go to the WJ Website (www.umvimwj.com) for other team stories.
- *Costs:* International missions, of course, tend to cost more than domestic missions. The farther away from the United States the project is located, the more travel costs you will likely incur, but we have worked with many project leaders to offer affordable mission opportunities, both domestically and abroad. As you prepare your budget, consider all costs associated with your trip: food, lodging, travel, construction materials, etc. We will detail the budgeting process later in this handbook.

Here are a few more helpful questions to ask your project host that will guide you as you prepare yourself and your team: When is the best time for our team to serve? Do you have a Priority Project you need to complete? What are the maximum and minimum numbers of volunteers you prefer for a team? What is the best way to communicate with you? Can you provide a detailed list of expected expenses (e.g. transportation, lodging, meals, translators, etc.)?

We discuss the important reasons for using UMVIM-approved mission opportunities in the Best Practices section, but UMVIM projects offer more than just accountability. UMVIM recommends serving with opportunities that have a community-based approach; we do not believe in "parachuting" in, serving for a week, and leaving forever. UMVIM, WJ supports these projects and initiatives by building relationships with project leaders and maintaining these relationships through many teams over many years. Building relationships is central to what we do as a ministry. What is more, we believe that building relationships is central to what it means to be a Christian.

Types of Mission Service

Our mission opportunity lists feature many kinds of service. Consider these needs as you put your team together. Please note that while most opportunities fall within these descriptions, many projects combine different needs. Some projects may include needs not described here.

Medical/Public Health

If you have medical professionals in your congregation, consider taking a medical team. Other types of projects can easily add a medical component, especially if you have church members with medical skills. Contact your project host to find out if these skills are needed.

While some established projects rely solely on medical professionals, medical skills are in such demand that a project can often be created for your team. Non-medical volunteers can still participate in medical teams, serving as assistant pharmacists or in other roles.

Note that treatment of acute manifestations of chronic problems often produces no lasting benefit and continuing care is usually not possible outside of the privileged few. Also, a medical program with an emphasis upon technology and medication far beyond the reach of the local medical community does little good for those in need. Tailor your team and tasks accordingly. Be cautious of raising expectations of help for specific patients, particularly if treatment would require transfer to the United States. Moreover, encompass teaching and training of the local medical professionals you will be working with. Equipping them to care for their community has a farther-reaching and lasting impact on those you are there to serve.

Medical teams have some unique steps to complete in preparation for travel. Talk with your host about credentialing requirements in the country in which you will be serving; you might also speak with a travel clinic about these requirements, as different countries require different methods of presenting credentials. Here are some general guidelines for credentialing, though it is very important that you discuss these matters with your host:

1. You will have to be cleared in some manner by an “official” body, usually the ministry of health.
2. Requirements most often are proof of graduation from your professional school, current licensure to practice, and completion of certain forms.
3. Usually, nurses do not have to register for short-term work, but must work with a doctor or dentist.
4. In most countries, physician assistants and nurse practitioners have no special status. In practice, if there are doctors working directly with them, they can perform similarly to the way they function in the United States.
5. Malpractice in developing countries is not as much of a concern as it is in the United States. UVMIM’s insurance does not include a malpractice provision. If you have a concern, contact your personal insurer to see if you are covered.

You should assume that you will have only what you take with you in the way of medical and dental equipment. If you are going to a specific facility and have contacted someone who has been there recently, you may be able to depend upon their report, especially if you are going to a hospital. Equipment and expendable supplies are hard to acquire in developing countries, and repairs and replacement parts are nearly impossible to locate. Still, there are a few medical and dental facilities with modern medical equipment. If your team is dependent on equipment and supplies, you will need to be directed to specific areas.

No matter where your team is located, plan on limited expendable or reusable supplies. Take all the surgical gloves that you need and some to leave. Surgical gowns and drapes are usually washed by hand and supplies often limit the amount of surgery that can be done each day.

You should plan to take your own examining instruments. If you can leave them, you will be contributing to your host's overall health care system without the added high costs of import duties.

Note: When taking in prescription medicine, it helps to have a letter in the native language from the Bishop or Head of Church in the area who will receive the medicines, as well as a valid prescription. If area doctors donate medical samples, breaking down the packaging helps in packing, but be sure that you do not break the seal on any medicines.

Public health is a growing field in which UMVIM teams serve. Particularly in international contexts, public health teams teach basic sanitation, disease prevention, and health skills to groups that do not have regular access to care. Those participating in these projects need not necessarily be trained medical professionals, though you will need to offer the team at least some "lay training" in public health before you travel. This is a good opportunity to invite a doctor or public health professional to train your team members. Your host will know more about the requirements needed.

Construction

Construction is the most common task of UMVIM teams, though not all construction teams solely do construction. Construction takes many forms, and there are UMVIM projects to fit all levels of construction experience. While UMVIM does offer projects requesting specific skilled labor, a majority of UMVIM construction projects can be completed by (mostly) unskilled labor. When unskilled labor is involved, it is vital that you rely on skilled labor on-site; this is also a great way to provide work for those with construction experience in the area you will be serving. Speak with your host to be sure that tools will be provided and that supplies can be purchased or ordered. If you will be bringing your tools, divide them among your team members for transport and consider offering them as a donation to the project. Some supplies, such as concrete, will have to be purchased on-site, so be sure that your host has a plan for purchasing them. As always, safety is a very important consideration; this issue will be dealt with later in this handbook.

Bible School/Evangelism

Bible School and evangelism teams are also popular types of service for UMVIM teams, and these types of projects can be done in conjunction with other projects (medical, construction,

etc.). Be sure to read the section on evangelism later in this handbook for more information. When preparing Bible School curriculum, be sure that the curriculum, including games and handouts, are in the native language of those whom you will be teaching. Employ a translator if necessary. Cultural sensitivity is important in planning Bible School as well. A curriculum based on space travel might not translate well to a community that knows nothing about the space program.

When planning your Bible School programs and activities, keep it simple, and be wary of “flashy” crafts and activities, as this can be harmful to the local church’s efforts in the long run; the children could come to expect their church to provide these programs on the same level, which might not be a possibility. Instead, consider purchasing any supplies you will need from a local source, so you are investing in their economy. Also take time to teach and mentor leaders while you are there and donate your extra supplies when you leave.

Disaster Response: Early Response and Long-Term Recovery

With memories fresh from major disasters throughout United States, UMVIM teams are, and will continue to be, a primary resource for long-term recovery efforts. It is essential that teams be prepared for effective service.

Disasters cause destruction, but disasters usually include many additional issues. Teams must understand that disasters have many layers beyond the actual tragedy. Effective service requires awareness of, and sensitivity to, these factors including: the loss of the usual norm or daily routine; hordes of “official” strangers, all from an alphabet-soup list of groups and agencies unfamiliar to most survivors; constant visible reminders of destruction; and years of community change compressed into a very small span of time.

The primary concern of the church and the disaster response group should be the survivor! Frequently, the survivor’s primary need is to tell his or her disaster story to someone willing to listen, and to be assisted in connecting with a range of disaster-related services.

Listening is more important than talking. Always remember that you are a guest and a servant. Just as with grief after a funeral, the recovery time following a disaster will take months and frequently years. Your team will be involved in only a small but important part of the healing work that needs to be done. Be willing to listen in a helpful way. Being judgmental or telling folks they “shouldn’t feel that way” is never helpful. Avoid the temptation to “fix” folks, to mend their brokenness or give them personal advice. Remember that time is an important healer.

A strong relationship between the volunteer teams and the local host disaster response organization is vital. The spirit with which the volunteer team approaches its work through the hosts will make or break its efforts in disaster response. Incoming volunteers must coordinate either through United Methodist channels or through the local interfaith response group at the site of the disaster. *Never* send in a team or supplies unannounced, unexpected, or uninvited.

Those offering themselves for volunteer services need to be available for a specific service but should be flexible enough to respond to needs that may be more immediate, such as mass

feeding, distribution of supplies, or cleanup of debris. Disaster response—and all mission work—is about serving where needed.

Know the stages of a disaster and the duration of each stage. This will provide the volunteer with an understanding of the bigger picture of a disaster's life cycle. Remember the 5 'R's' of disaster response:

- *Readiness Stage:* Training and preparation before a disaster strikes. Being properly trained can help save lives and minimize further damage.
- *Rescue Stage:* The first few hours or days immediately following a disaster. The duration depends on the level of devastation. Local persons and agencies work tirelessly to stabilize the situation to prevent added loss of life and property. This phase is generally handled only by trained emergency professionals.
- *Relief Stage:* Lasts approximately ten times as long as the Rescue Stage. Trained Early Response Teams (ERTs) assist in removing debris, securing homes from further damage, and encouraging survivors to apply for needed assistance. But the primary function of ERTs is to provide a caring Christian presence to the survivors of the disaster. Early Response volunteers should be 100% self-sufficient. Training for such teams is coordinated through UMVIM, WJ and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and requires (1) certification of training in Early Response by the sending annual conference and UMCOR, and (2) an invitation from the affected conference.

Note: that ERT training is not the same as UMVIM team leader training.

- *Recovery Stage:* Lasts approximately ten times as long as the Relief Stage and is the time of rebuilding.

Your team should remember that you are guests of the local host organization and should work under its direction, understanding that the local response staff has no control over such things as building codes, permits, etc. It is not helpful for each volunteer to tell them that the situation was different in another disaster. It is also very important to do the work assigned. Your team does not have the option of deciding that a home is not worthy of being salvaged. Though your team may deem it damaged beyond repair, it could be the only living space available to the survivor.

Let your team know beforehand that flexibility is key. If the local host organization redirects your work, you should accept and affirm the change, pitch in, and do what you can. The only constant following a disaster is change!

Typically, your team should plan on providing the materials needed for rebuilding. Monies for any materials should, where possible, be forwarded to the local host organization before the volunteer team arrives so that the materials can be purchased locally. The disbursement of funding from other sources is frequently delayed by stipulations on its use, so teams should always be prepared to supply materials for the work they will do.

Know that helping those affected by disaster is much the same as caring for a family that has experienced a sudden and tragic death. Approach survivors' possessions with great care. What might seem like trash to you could be a precious treasure to the survivor.

Rest is important. Sleep is vital. Many groups plan a day of rest and relaxation or recreation as part of their mission. Plan some fun while you are away. Include your hosts where possible.

Transportation needs of the group should be determined and handled prior to arrival. Do not expect the local disaster response organization to take care of transporting work crews.

- *Review Stage:* The time after recovery, when volunteer organizations assess what went well and what can be improved, and then modify best practices if necessary. This time is also a great opportunity to look at how to reduce risks the next time a disaster strikes, such as designating storm shelters and creating emergency preparedness kits.

International Disaster Response

In the early stages of the disaster response, volunteers are most helpful in sending funds to UMCOR through The Advance, (the official program of The United Methodist Church for voluntary, designated giving beyond apportionments) or to assemble relief kits as specified and requested by UMCOR. More information on these kits is available on their website, www.umcor.org.

If there is a need for an international volunteer response, it takes time to develop logistical support and structure to receive volunteers. Going too soon to an already stressed infrastructure causes potential harm to an area that may already have limited resources of food, water, transportation, and lodging. When the affected area has the resources and infrastructure to invite volunteers, the jurisdictional offices will communicate the necessary information.

NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Teams

Occasionally, UMVIM teams have the opportunity to work with other nongovernmental organizations. These teams assist in direct ministry to persons in need, in ways that advance the dignity of persons without regard to religion, race, nationality, or gender.

Because of NGO's unique relationships with other countries and governments and because of security concerns, teams who work with NGOs are asked to honor the commitment and provide humanitarian aid by reaching out to serve those who are suffering, as described in Matthew 25:31-41. This means that in the NGO setting, food is given to the hungry, water is offered to the thirsty, hospitality is offered to strangers, clothing is given to the naked, those who are sick and in prison are cared for—with no strings attached.

Volunteers who desire to serve in this setting are asked to show their faith and love by what they do and not by what they say. It is inappropriate to engage in proselytizing, converting others to United Methodism, preaching, or praying in public. Not all teams will want to serve in this capacity, and there are a multitude of other UMVIM opportunities for those who wish their team to have a more evangelistic focus.

UMVIM individuals and teams must realize some faiths and locations are hostile toward or offended by the Christian faith. Although Christ called us to share our faith, we are to do this through our actions, and not openly when working with an NGO.

Youth

More and more youth leaders are contacting UMVIM, WJ about sending youth mission teams out for service, both domestically and abroad. These leaders believe—and UMVIM, WJ agrees—that mission is the best Christian education the church can offer young people. A youth who experiences a mission opportunity during his or her formative years will remember that trip and its lessons for a lifetime.

UMVIM, WJ does not have a minimum age for youth missionaries. Obviously, some mission opportunities are not appropriate for youth, but there are many UMVIM opportunities which can host youth (and families) of all ages. Visit our website or call the UMVIM, WJ office for a list of UMVIM-sanctioned mission opportunities that are youth-appropriate.

UMVIM, WJ seeks to make the process of planning a mission as easy as possible for youth leaders. We understand that most youth leaders and pastors are already stretched thin. Because we believe that mission is so important to helping youth understand how God is at work in the world, we are ready to assist you as you plan this important event in the lives of your youth.

Other Types of Service

There are even more ways you can plug into mission opportunities, such as training in specialized fields, and other appropriate activities in consultation with UMVIM and its partners. Examples include:

- *Educational:* Educational missions includes opportunities where the goal is to instruct and equip, such as assisting with summer and day camps, teaching English or computer technology, therapeutic drama and art programs, and more.
- *Agriculture:* Agriculture service could include training farmers in improving their methods of growing, harvesting, selling, and/or storing food, or even assisting a grower with any of these things as an extra “helping hand.”
- *Water:* Missions that focus on water could encompass programs such as installing water catchment and storage systems, teaching water sanitation, digging wells, implementing irrigation methods, and more.

Gathering a Team

Recruiting a team is one of the most important tasks of the team leader, and the composition of the mission team can make or break the mission experience. If you have already decided on a project, you will have an idea of what kind of skills you are looking for. For instance, a medical project will benefit by having various medical professionals on the team: sometimes this means doctors and nurses, but projects vary. Some medical projects may be looking for pharmacists and physical therapists. Knowing the needs of the project will help you determine what kind of team members you will need.

Application

One of the best ways to put together a successful team is through an application process. Put together an application for prospective team members to complete, detailing their skills, their motivations for mission, their experience, and whatever else you care to know. This is a good time to find out about prospective team members' physical abilities; it is always better to learn this information *before* the trip rather than *on* the trip, particularly in situations of rough terrain and difficult living conditions. A team application also gives you the opportunity to ask questions that will help you get to know prospective members in a new way. You can learn a lot about someone by asking them about their favorite books, movies, and television shows. Asking a potential team member to complete an application, along with asking for a small deposit to secure their spot on the team after approval, is also a good way to gauge if they are seriously committed to the mission journey.

Applications have two other advantages. First, they give you an insight into how conscientious a prospective team member is about details. If an applicant turns in her application late (without a reasonable excuse), you learn something about her attention to detail. Second, the application process helps you say “no” to those people who are not best-suited for your specific mission. Whereas it can be difficult to deny a spot to someone who has “signed up” for the mission, the application process puts the assembly of the team in the team leader’s hands. Remember, the team leader is responsible for all members of the team, and if a prospective member presents problems for the team before the trip begins, it is a safe bet that these problems will multiply exponentially while traveling. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

There is a sample application in the Appendix.

Selecting the Team

Pray for guidance as you set out to build your team. Even if you are gathering your team before you have selected a project, it is best—once you have received team applications—to construct your team with skills in mind. This is not to say that all your team members must be highly skilled workers. All Christians have something to offer in the name of Christ, so consider looking beyond only professional skills. If you do not have a specialized project that will require specific skills, consider building a team with a variety of skills. This will ensure that the team will be successful. In addition, different projects require different sized teams with differing abilities.

A build in West Virginia may be appropriate for 40 youth, but the proper team for a trip to southern Sudan may be 10–12 experienced adults. Confer with your host, if you have selected your project.

We have compiled a list of traits of successful teams. Be on the lookout for these traits when selecting team members and be sure to communicate these traits to team members when you hold your team orientation. It is important for team members to keep these qualities in the front of their minds, especially on days when the mission is particularly difficult. These traits are:

- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Low goal and/or task orientation
- Open-mindedness
- Nonjudgmental attitude
- Empathy
- Communicativeness
- Flexibility (the ability to adapt)
- Curiosity
- Sense of humor
- Personal warmth
- Motivation
- Self-reliance
- Strong sense of self
- Tolerance for differences
- Perceptiveness
- Ability to fail well

Planning the Mission Journey

Working with Church and Pastor for Support

Just because the rest of the church is not traveling with the mission team does not mean the sending congregation is not part of the mission! Having a supportive pastor and congregation goes a long way towards ensuring a successful mission. As you move from selecting your team to implementing the project, be sure to have discussions with your pastor and other church leaders, so that everyone can be on the same page. As part of the church, it is their mission too, and they deserve to be in communication with you and your team.

It is also helpful to have these folks on your side as you prepare. Sometimes, mission leaders are surprised at the amount of pushback they get from church members. Arguments like, “Why don’t we just send them money?” and “We should help the people here before we go to another state or country!” are more common than many new team leaders realize. Don’t get defensive! A good place to turn for help is Scripture. In Acts 1:8, Jesus did not call us to be witnesses in Jerusalem *or* Judea *or* Samaria *or* to the ends of the earth...we are called to be witnesses *everywhere*. UMVIM is committed to holistic mission service and a healthy mission model, which is why we encourage team leaders to read this handbook and go through UMVIM Team Leader Training program. Reading this handbook, becoming trained and talking with your pastor and church leaders early on will help prepare you to respond constructively to the pushback while also equipping you and your team to make the most of your mission journey.

Working with your church and pastor will help when it comes time to fundraise, as well. Present the mission as being supported and undertaken by the entire congregation. The mission team is sent from among the congregation, but it is the congregation doing the sending. There may be members of your church who are unable to travel but can provide gifts of time or money. Utilize these people, as it will take pressure off you as the team leader and lead to a greater acceptance of your team among the church.

Project Communication

Communication with project hosts can be difficult, particularly in international contexts. Part of becoming an official UMVIM project involves agreeing to communicate in a timely manner, but international understandings of “timely” vary widely. Even mission project hosts within the United States can sometimes be difficult to reach, as these leaders are often overburdened and dealing with many teams. Be persistent in your communication but be patient as well.

It is vitally important that you are very clear with your hosts about what you expect from them, and what they expect from you. Being clear and honest does not mean that you are unwilling to honor local customs or traditions. You do not want to travel to Cambodia, for instance, believing that laundry service is available and find out once you arrive that there is no laundry detergent for 100 miles. Whatever your questions, communicate them to your host. Rest assured that no question is too personal or stupid. Accepting volunteers is what mission hosts do, and they are by and large very used to and comfortable with any questions you may have. Make a list of

these questions and be sure to ask them as you prepare. As you continue to read this handbook, some of these questions will perhaps be answered.

Email is the best way to communicate, as you will have traceable information; email also allows for communication across large time differences. Still, email communication in other countries can be spotty. Keep at it. If the language barrier is a problem, find someone in your church to translate. Often, UMVIM project leaders in other countries speak English. Do make sure that, if needed, a translator will be provided for your team.

Know that if you absolutely cannot reach your hosts, or if you are having trouble communicating, you can always contact the UMVIM, WJ office for assistance.

Evacuation Plan

When communicating with your host, it is vital to discuss an evacuation plan in the event of inclement weather (like a hurricane or typhoon) or a potential violent uprising. Determine what you would do if a situation arises to ensure the safety of your team. Identify a secure location and—should the situation warrant—an exit strategy. If your destination is international, check with your airline to see what accommodations can be made if evacuation is required. Consider purchasing additional travel insurance as it could assist with evacuation costs.

Downtime for Reflection

As you communicate with your project host, be sure to speak with the host about downtime for team reflection. This may take the form of cultural sightseeing activities that allow you to learn about the local culture and people. An afternoon at the beach, or a couple of days at the end of the trip at a different location, should be spent relaxing, but scheduled around organized discussion. Remind your team members that this isn't vacation time, but rather a time to reflect and learn.

Extended reflection time is an excellent way to help the team process what they have seen and experienced. Christian mission carries with its great implications for how we understand God and the world, and extended reflection, especially at the end of a trip, helps your team members think through what these implications mean for their own lives and the way they live out their faith. Many team leaders have found great success, time and budget permitting, in scheduling an extra day or two at the end of the trip in a different location. This time allows team members to see things they otherwise would not be able to see and relieves some of the pressure to “see everything” during the actual mission phase of the trip. A team traveling to Mozambique, for instance, might take a bus to South Africa and spend a day or two on a photo safari. Or a team working at Choctaw United Methodist Mission in Mississippi might drive up to Oxford or Tupelo and spend a day sightseeing there. For many team members, the change in accommodations alone will spark reflection of the mission they have done. Later in this handbook, we will examine reverse culture shock and the ways in which it can be used as a tool to help your team members process what they have experienced.

Suggestions for facilitating reflection can be found in *A Mission Journey: A Handbook for Volunteers*.

Registration and Insurance

As mentioned in the Best Practices section, UMVIM, WJ provides insurance coverage for teams traveling both domestically and internationally. Because the information associated with this program changes occasionally, it is very important that you visit the Insurance Information page on the UMVIM website (www.umvimwj.com) to find the latest insurance information. Please note that some annual conferences require all teams from within their bounds receive approval from its UMVIM coordinator or committee. Be sure to register far enough in advance that you have time to speak with your Conference UMVIM Coordinator. Also note that UMVIM, WJ requires that all insurance applications be completed online at least two weeks prior to your departure date to allow time for processing. Registering later than this may result in late fees if purchasing insurance.

Other Forms and Information

UMVIM, WJ has created a packet of forms for team leaders to collect necessary information from members; these can be found under *Resources* on the WJ website at www.umvimwj.com.

The paperwork you will collect is extremely important, as it should include your team's emergency contact information, insurance ID cards, copies of passports, paperwork for you and your church, and other types of information of a sensitive nature. We always suggest keeping a Team Leader binder with you, leaving a copy with someone at your church, and keeping a copy electronically, either on a flash drive or tablet.

Taxes

Generally speaking, costs associated with a short-term mission trip *are* tax deductible. However, there are guidelines associated with deducting these costs, and it is important to discuss these guidelines with your accountant. If there is an accountant in your church congregation, you might ask him or her to speak with your group about how to claim mission trip expenses as tax deductions, including common pitfalls. For your information, a summary of IRS Publication 526 is included in the Appendix.

Timeline

As you prepare for your mission, create a timeline for your team members. Be sure to include deadlines for returning the application, paying trip deposits, completing forms, and offering payment. A payment schedule is particularly helpful, as it will allow team members to pay for their trip in stages, as the team prepares to travel.

The timeline should also include dates for team orientation, fundraisers, and other meetings. Be sure your team members know the dates of these meetings before they sign up, as these meetings are vitally important for preparing your team. Attendance should be a requirement for joining the team.

Also include in your timeline dates for purchasing airline tickets, confirming travel and other plans with the host and any other task that you as the team leader need to complete before your departure.

Be sure to schedule the commissioning service with the pastor of your church as a time of sending-forth. This service can happen in worship or outside of worship, and it is an important time of centering. Holding a commissioning service also gives the rest of the congregation who are not traveling an opportunity to actively participate in the sending of the team. A sample commissioning service is included in the Appendix.

Budget

Building a budget is an integral part of assembling your team and preparing for your mission. The budget will help team members know you are spending their money wisely, ensure that you are remembering all the things which must be purchased before your trip, and ultimately let people know before they sign up how much they can expect to spend while traveling. Keep in mind costs like construction materials and tools requested by the host, lodging, laundry, food, excursions, travel fees, excess baggage fees on airlines, etc. Also remember that it is far better to over-budget than under-budget. Consider building in a 10% emergency fund for unexpected expenses. If the money isn't needed you can either reimburse any overages to your team members or donate it to your project hosts.

The further ahead you plan your budget, the more time you will have to ensure that you have remembered everything. As you prepare the budget, be sure to let team members who feel “sticker-shock” know what fundraising opportunities are available, and encourage them to discuss their trip with family, coworkers, and friends. Often these people are great sources of financial support. Fundraising will be discussed in the coming pages. A sample budget form is included in the Appendix.

Airline Tickets

Airline tickets and other transportation expenses typically make up a large percentage of the entire cost. Minimizing this cost can be difficult, but it can be done. Begin by checking out various airline and discount fare sites online to get a base understanding of how much travel will cost. This research takes time, but it is invaluable as you search for deals. Watch out for discount sites, as some sites offer tickets that are affordable but non-refundable.

Call around to various airlines, as well. If a location is served by more than one airline, speak to a customer service representative and let them know you are shopping around. Airline representatives will sometimes take a special interest in helping you out when they learn that your group will be doing humanitarian work.

Some groups like to designate a member—or even a congregation member who will not actually be traveling with the team—the responsibility of securing airline tickets. This is a good job for someone who enjoys looking for deals.

One tactic for keeping airline costs low is to investigate several different airports for your departure. Some teams have found that chartering a bus to take them to a different airport keeps costs down, as flights from major hubs often save money.

Some team leaders prefer working with a travel agency, which offers you the opportunity to put your travel plans in the hands of someone experienced with this kind of travel. They can be especially useful if your group is traveling to more than one location, traveling far away, or undertaking a complicated itinerary. While there is a premium charged for this service, many team leaders find the additional cost worth it

International Travel

Passports

If you are traveling internationally, be sure that each team member has a current passport. Names on international airline tickets should match the names on your team member's passports exactly. The expiration date for each team member's passport should be at least 6 months to one year after the date of mission; if the expiration date is earlier, have the team member go ahead and renew, as some countries require extra time before expiration. Passport applications can be slow to process, so each team member needs to know that getting a passport must happen immediately upon being selected for the trip. Even "expedited" status does not mean that the passport will come quickly.

Passport applications can be obtained on the US State Department website. There are also authorized passport acceptance facilities across the country where you can apply in person. Locations and further information on these facilities can also be found on the US State Department website.

Once your team members have their passports, make sure that they pack a copy of the photo page in their luggage; should a team member lose his or her passport, this will be an important part of getting a new one from the embassy. It is also a good idea to have someone who remains behind keep a folder containing copies of your team's passport photo pages, should they be needed. Some teams also require their team members to get an extra set of passport pictures, as this too speeds up replacing a lost or stolen passport.

Visas

Many countries require a visa for any visitors. A visa is a statement of permission to enter a country, and it is generally stamped inside your passport. Discuss this requirement with your host and visit the international travel section of the US State Department website for more information on visa requirements and other travel advisories. On that page, you will also find country-specific information for your destination. Should your host country require a visa, instructions are listed on that page. Please note that you should discuss with your host which type of visa you will need. *In nearly all situations, including mission teams, you will want to apply for tourist visas, not missionary visas.*

Travel Warnings and Advisories

On your destination country's page on the US State Department website, you will also can register your team with the US Embassy or Consulate nearest to where you will be staying. As discussed in the Best Practices section, if you are traveling abroad, register your team with

STEP, the US State Department's **Smart Traveler Enrollment Program**. Registering your team is very important in the unlikely situation that you need international assistance while traveling.

We suggest that you check with the US State Department to see if there is a travel warning or alert for your destination. A travel warning might be issued because of unstable governments, war, terrorist attacks, or intense crime. You should very carefully consider if you want to travel to a country with a travel warning. It is also possible that UMWIM, WJ might not insure teams who travel to these countries.

Travel advisories are issued for short-term situations, such as severe weather warnings (cyclones, hurricane), health concerns or outbreaks (cholera, H1N1, Chikungunya, etc.), and elections where protests or demonstrations are likely.

Keep in mind that in some underdeveloped or developing nations, the emergency response infrastructure in place may be weak. Ask your host how emergencies are communicated and addressed and the medical support options available.

Raising Money

Fundraising

Fundraising can be one of the most time-consuming aspects of your mission. While important, do not allow it to consume all your energy. When raising money becomes the primary objective of a mission team, the overall mission can be quickly lost in the day-to-day struggles of preparing for the journey. In all that you do, remind your team *why* they are raising funds. These funds allow them to serve God in a special way.

With that said funding the mission is almost always a central concern of mission team members. Offering opportunities for team members to raise funds to offset costs keep finances from being barriers to Christian service.

Even more, if the entire congregation is to participate in the mission, it is your responsibility as team leader to inform them of opportunities to participate, including (and, at times, especially) financially. Many people are interested in helping, but they do not know how, or they do not believe their small offerings will help. Let these people know how much you value their support! Small donations add up to large sums, and often, these small donations can mean a lot to team members. Speak with your pastor about asking for support for the mission team. The church has an important role to play.

Like the congregation, family and friends also have an important role to play in funding the mission. Team members are sometimes afraid to ask for support, but again, these small donations add up to large sums. Tell your team members to consider sending letters to family, co-workers, and friends, detailing the mission and offering the opportunity to participate financially. Thank you notes, postcards sent from the project site, and small presents from your destination often make the difference between one-time support and sustained support for future mission opportunities.

Most teams also schedule fundraisers specifically for their mission journey. The money from these fundraisers can be used for project funds or individual scholarships, or it can be used to offset the total cost for the entire team. These fundraisers encompass a wide variety of activities used to raise money and awareness about the project. Sometimes, these events are more “fun-raisers” than fundraisers, but they inevitably serve the purpose of spreading the word about the good work you are doing. Consider selecting a fundraising chair to coordinate these opportunities.

Because teams have found a wide variety of fundraisers to be successful. Here are a few ideas we have seen to be successful. Network with others who are experienced in mission-based fundraising for more ideas. You might choose to do one or do several but be mindful of “returning to the well” too many times. Incorporate your fundraising dates in your timeline and communicate all activities to your pastor for approval.

- *Coffeehouse performances*: Let your team members and other congregation members offer their talents in support of your mission and collect donations at the door.
- *T-shirt sales*: Often, t-shirt sales do not raise large amounts of money on their own, but they present great opportunities for raising awareness of your project. Every person

who wears your team t-shirt is advertising the great work God is doing through your team!

- *Church-wide yard and consignment sales:* Set up a consignment or yard sale at your church and designate that proceeds help fund your mission team. If you anticipate a large crowd, consider working with a professional consignment company. One team sets up an annual sale of once-worn prom dresses and reports that it is always a great success. Be creative!
- *Dinners:* If you are traveling internationally, consider putting together a dinner consisting of food specific to that country. It will allow those who are not traveling with you to experience the mission in a unique way. Often, people who attend these dinners feel more connected with your team and are more likely to participate financially in your team's mission. If country-specific food is not an option, consider holding a spaghetti dinner and presenting details of what you will be doing on your mission.
- *Silent auctions:* This is another great way to get members of your church who will not be traveling involved in your mission. Allow those who can offer goods and services, the use of a vacation home for example, the opportunity to support your team.
- *Work days:* An excellent way for youth teams to raise money is to offer their services to church members for a few hours on a weekend or two. Often, older members of the church could use the help mowing their lawn or doing light repair work on their homes. This project has the added benefit of building relationships between youth and the older members of the church.

However, you choose to raise funds for your team, be sure to be sensitive to the financial needs of your members. Though finances are a delicate issue, they are often in the front of the mind of team members. Helping to ease this financial burden is vital to a successful mission.

Note of caution: The *United Methodist Book of Discipline* forbids raffles for any purpose.

Scholarships and Team Responsibilities

If possible, offer scholarships for team members who otherwise could not afford the trip. Scholarships should not cover the entire cost, as it is important for members to have a personal investment in the mission.

One strategy for scholarships involves offering financial support to those who perform certain tasks for your mission journey. For instance, many teams "hire" a team photographer to document the entire journey in pictures. By offering a small (\$200-300) stipend, you are helping that team member cover his or her expenses, and you are solving the common problem of having every member clicking en masse when they see something interesting. Just be sure that your team photographer understands their responsibilities and has some photography experience. Other tasks that can be performed for scholarship are team journalist (someone who blogs about the trip during travel), a team information specialist (who researches and reports on the area to which you will be traveling), or an assistant team leader. Be creative; you can easily delegate responsibilities while offering financial support to those who need it.

Team Orientation

Holding a team orientation is an important step in preparing your team for mission. This meeting—or series of meetings—will help your team understand the work they are going to do, as well as get them thinking about issues of safety, health, cultural sensitivity and the like. Some team leaders choose to hold this orientation by scheduling weekly meetings over the period of a month or two; other leaders choose to hold intensive day-or-weekend-long sessions. However, you choose to hold your team orientation sessions (and there are templates offered to assist you in the Appendix), the following are important matters that need to be covered.

Spiritual Health

Spiritual health is a very important part of the mission experience. A team that is spiritually healthy and attuned to the work of God within them is a successful one. And yet it can be difficult to maintain spiritual health amid so much work. Often, we get in the mode of “doing as much as possible while we are here,” and while the sentiment is a well-intentioned one, it does not do justice to the work of God in our own lives. It is possible for a missionary to go on a mission journey and not be changed, but if you as the team leader—and if the team members themselves—are intentional about paying attention to spiritual health, such an outcome is unlikely. If you are not gifted at spiritual direction or teaching, consider asking one of your team members to be the spiritual director; if your team includes a pastor, this is a good job for that person.

Be sure to begin and end each day in prayer. Often, we get so busy with the particulars of the mission that we miss this important step. Do not let this happen to you! Prayer began the trip, as you started to build a team and pick a location, and it should sustain the team throughout the experience. Additionally, devotionals are important as your team grows together spiritually. Ask each person to present a short devotion during your travels, making sure everyone can share.

Finally, recognize that mission work can be spiritually and emotionally exhausting. For those who do not encounter poverty, illness, or great need daily, this work is especially taxing. Take the time to allow God to work within those team members who need an extra boost. Look after your team, and give them the chance to share, to rest, and to be in the presence of God.

An excellent resource for team members is *A Mission Journey: A Handbook for Volunteers*, by the General Board of Global Ministries. It is available through The Upper Room (www.upperroom.org) or Amazon.

Reflection

Most team leaders set aside time each night for the team members to reflect upon how they have seen God at work, to discuss any issues related to the day, to share plans for the next day, and to pray together.

Discuss your schedule for reflection with your team before you leave. If you have scheduled additional time at the end of your travel dates for reflection, explain to them how this will work. Reflection time is not “goof-off” or “vacation” time; reflection can be hard work! It involves tough

questions and group discussion. Your team members should understand the importance of this work before they travel, so that they are not surprised when they face tough issues.

You will want to begin these reflections sessions before you leave so that your team can enter the proper mission mindset, and so that they can begin to think about issues of charity and justice.

Evangelism

As the team leader, it is important for you to understand that your team members may have wildly divergent understandings of what evangelism means, which is perfectly acceptable for your team. However, if you do not discuss this issue before departing, it will often come up during the mission in less-than-productive ways.

Discerning how each of your team members understands evangelism is vital for a successful mission journey. Have a discussion during your team orientation about this topic. You might even tell your team members beforehand so that they can be thinking about their own understandings of evangelism. Consider having your team do the “Mission Is” exercise, located in the Appendix.

Talk about the fact that people disagree about what evangelism means: some people believe that evangelism means “saving souls,” and others believe evangelism involves a “silent witness.” However, your team members understand evangelism and faith-sharing, know that this topic is sometimes a very divisive one for mission teams. Evangelism, it seems, goes right to the heart of how each of us understands the Gospel. So, when people disagree about what evangelism means or how it should be conducted, they are really disagreeing about something much deeper. If you are not proactive about discussing the issue beforehand, these disagreements can get heated and cause division within your team.

As you talk about evangelism, be sure to talk about “making disciples.” Professions of faith have less potential if they are not followed by disciple-making, either by folks in the project area or your team. For instance, receiving 400 professions of faith sounds great, but it is important that there are resources for those people to be discipled into more mature Christians. Making disciples require commitment from your team as well as those who profess Christ. Be sure, too, that your team members are on the lookout to find opportunities to share the love of God with those who need it most. God calls us to no less than this.

Health/Safety

Issues of health and safety can make or break your mission experience. If a team member gets hurt, the whole project can be thrown off balance. It is your responsibility as a team leader to ensure your team’s safety. Because there are different construction standards in different countries, your understanding of safe practices may, at times, conflict with your host’s. If safety conditions concern you, it is better to graciously work with your host to find a safer method than to risk injury to one of your team members.

Your team’s health is your responsibility, as well; no one benefits from a sick team member. Be sure to encourage your team members to rest adequately and drink plenty of water. If possible,

bring a doctor or nurse along on the trip. It is also important to have medications available for your team, should you be in an area that does not have medications readily available. Talk with your doctor about carrying Cipro or other antibiotics in case someone on your team needs them to treat travelers' diarrhea. Should your team not use all the antibiotics, there is often a clinic near the project site that could use the extra medicine. If you do bring prescription medications, be sure to have your doctor write out a prescription or carry the medicines in pill bottles printed with the name of the doctor and the pharmacy. This includes medicines you will leave behind, as well as personal prescriptions for members of your team.

Some countries require certain inoculations for international travelers. It is your responsibility as team leader to ensure that your team has the latest information on vaccines and inoculations. Visit the website for the Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) and the international travel section of the US State Department website (<http://travel.state.gov/travel>) for more information and talk with your doctor. The best resources for travel health information are travel clinics; these clinics can be found in many cities. Discuss the nature of your trip with the staff at one of these clinics, and they will be able to help you understand the steps that your team needs to take. Traveling to countries in which malaria is found, for instance, necessitates your team taking a malaria prophylaxis, but depending on the severity of the malaria presence, different medicines are needed. The travel clinic will know.

For a suggested list of medicines and supplies for your team's first aid kit, see the Appendix.

Safe Churches

Contact your annual conference or visit your conference's website for more information about its Safe Churches (as called Safe Sanctuaries or Safe Gatherings) policy. Your team needs to be well-versed in this policy before you travel, as concern about the most vulnerable among us is a very important part of serving on a mission team. Your annual conference's specific Safe Churches policy applies to your team; however, there are some general guidelines in the Appendix.

Water and Food

Before you travel to your destination, it is vital that you discuss the issue of drinking water with your host and team. If your team is traveling within the United States, water is not usually a problem, but different standards for drinking water in other countries mean that you need to be careful. Talk with your host about water for your team. If filtered or bottled water is not available at the site, be sure that your team purchases water bottles with built-in filters (charcoal filters help to remove chemical impurities, but not bacteria), or invest in a large commercial filter that removes most bacteria. Even if the water is safe for locals, Americans are usually not used to the bacteria sometimes present in drinking water in other countries. Boiling water for at least 20 minutes is the surest way of purifying water of bacteria and microbes.

A corollary of this caution is that your team members need to be certain to use bottled or filtered water to brush their teeth and wash their toothbrush. Because rinsing a toothbrush under the faucet is second nature to many people, try placing a bottle of water on top of the faucet so that

when your team members go to turn it on, they are reminded to use the bottled water. Remind your team members, also, to refrain from opening their mouth in the shower.

In some areas, bottled water and other drinks are sold in roadside stands or carts. Be wary of bottled water sold from these carts; in some countries, vendors reuse water bottles by refilling them with tap water. Make sure the caps have not been tampered with.

Finally, your team needs to be careful about what they eat. Only food that has been peeled, cooked, or boiled should be eaten; produce like lettuce should be washed only in filtered or bottled water.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is one of the most important—and sometimes most difficult—aspects of Christian mission. Being culturally aware requires knowledge of local customs and language, a respect for diversity, and a heart-felt commitment to relating to people as they are, rather than as we wish that they were. Every action, every gesture, and every word spoken carries with its cultural implications, and it takes purposeful restraint to behave in a culturally sensitive way.

Whether you are traveling to Angola or Appalachia, cultural awareness is vital to ensuring a successful mission. Working to understand the culture in which you will be serving is part of being a faithful Christian, but so, too, is understanding that you are carrying your own cultural understandings and prejudices.

Your team members may find themselves frustrated by language barriers, lack of mobility, the formality of relationships in other cultures, the (often complicated) protocol required, the completely different understanding of time, the lack of conveniences, unusual local customs, and other differences in which they are not familiar. Your team will need to adapt to differences in schedule, noise, food, and work. Keep in mind that while some cultures might seem “extreme” to us, our culture might seem “extreme” to those we encounter.

Let your team know beforehand that these issues will arise and devise a plan for dealing with them. Often, letting your team know that these feelings are normal will help them cope with cultural differences.

Just as it is your responsibility as team leader to prepare your team for the frustration involved with the different views of time and tasks in other cultures, it is also your responsibility to inform your team about some of the habits which we find quite conventional, but which might be perceived as offensive in other cultures. We have found that project hosts list six traits of some mission teams from the United States which prove to most stand in the way of building authentic relationships.

Teams which do not take the issue of cultural sensitivity seriously:

1. Expect to accomplish more than is possible.
2. Are insensitive to local customs and culture.
3. Do not work through proper channels.
4. Like to take credit for themselves.

5. Act as if they know everything.
6. Are too task-oriented, abrupt, and insensitive.

Help your team be aware that these traits will—fairly or unfairly—be projected onto your team. The responsibility is on the team, then, to prove to your host that they can be trusted with the difficult work of building relationships. Speak with your team about ethnocentrism, which is the belief that our culture is the best and that our ways of doing things are better than all others. Our culture is not better than other cultures; our culture is different than other cultures. Make sure your team knows that if they enter the mission site without checking their feelings of cultural superiority at the door, they will achieve very little for the Kingdom of God.

One way to help your team overcome their natural feelings of ethnocentrism is to focus on intercultural communication. Communication is the transmission of various symbols—whether they are words, letters, gestures, colors, or shapes—from one person to another. The difficulty arises when the meaning of the symbol's changes. Sometimes, of course, the meanings change in an obvious way. The main difficulty comes to the forefront when the changes are subtle and nuanced. This is often the case when one enters another culture. The familiar “OK” hand signal we use in the United States, for instance, is deeply offensive in some countries. Even words with which we are very familiar sometimes do not translate very well into other languages, often creating embarrassing cultural faux pas.

This is not to say that your team will not commit cultural faux pas. Prepare your team that, it is ok to laugh at themselves, if this ever happens. Cultural faux pas are often funny, and laughter has a way of diffusing an otherwise tense situation.

Two things will help your team build relationships and function best in a culturally foreign context: careful listening and the courage to ask questions. Listen very carefully for subtle clues and instructions. Often, simply listening will help answer your questions about proper customs and cultural minutiae. Also, know that project hosts are experienced at working with mission teams from other cultures. Rarely is any question offensive. If you have a question, simply ask! You will put your project hosts at ease as they recognize your willingness to work within their culture, and you will put your team at ease as some of their anxiety of not knowing is removed. Even if it takes several times asking the same questions in different ways, stick with it. Your relationships will be strengthened because of your persistence.

Packing/Clothing

Your team members, especially if traveling on a mission for the first time, may have some concerns about packing. Here are some general guidelines for packing for the travel portion of your mission journey.

If you are flying, be sure to check with your airline for luggage weight limits, restricted items and fees for excessive baggage. If possible, pack all your personal items and clothes in a carry-on bag; remember that once you land, you will be expected to carry all your luggage.

Talk with your host to see if laundry service is an option. Having your clothes washed onsite offers two benefits: you can carry less clothing, and you are putting money into the local economy by offering work to church members or local people.

Be sure that your important items like money, passport, medicines, camera, and any valuables are packed in your carry-on bag. In your carry-on, pack one complete change of clothing, including underwear, in case your luggage gets lost.

When possible, plan on buying tools and supplies at the location you will be serving; this will keep you from having to haul all your supplies to the site, and it supports the local economy.

When you cannot buy supplies on location, tools and materials should be brought with you, divided among team members for transport. Use ribbon or luggage labels to help you identify team member bags.

If you are bringing anything unusual with you on your trip—large quantities of medicines, for example—you may need a manifest of items in each bag to carry with you. It is also a good idea to have a letter of invitation from the host indicating all items are donations. A letter from the Bishop or head of church in the native language works best.

Always ask your host about bedding, towels, etc. Often these items are provided, and you can save valuable space in your luggage. Still, it is always important to ask to avoid arriving in your destination without linens!

Finally, be sensitive to cultural expectations. Discuss with your host and your team what clothing is appropriate on the work site, what is appropriate at church services, and what is suitable for the climate and culture of your destination. In many areas, women are expected to wear long pants or skirts and shirts that cover the shoulders. While dressing conservatively may not be the norm for today, remind your team that you will be guests in another culture, and cultural sensitivity requires that you play by their rules.

Politics/Book Club

Take some time to discuss the area to which you will be traveling. Some teams have found it useful to share in the reading of a book about the history of the project country or area. Having this information gives team members more ownership of the project and can help them better appreciate their work. If you will be traveling internationally, learn a bit about the politics and government of the country you will be visiting: who the President or Prime Minister is, what form of government is used, what civil wars have been fought, etc. People who live in the project area often appreciate that teams have taken the time to learn more about their country. Also, if another language is to be spoken at the project site, take the time to learn some of the language. Even if you do not become fluent by the time you travel, knowing the common greeting or phrases like “Where is the bathroom?” and “God bless you” go a long way towards showing local people that you really do care about the work you are doing.

Alcohol, Tobacco, Vaping, and Drugs

Often, alcohol, tobacco, vaping, and certain (illegal) drug use is considered unacceptable for Christians by other cultures. While this expectation is not present in most churches in the United States, it is a very serious offense in many developing countries. Going to the bar for a drink after a long day of work may not seem like a big deal to your team, but it can absolutely devastate your hosts and completely discount the relationship-building work you have done. We do not usually hear many complaints about UMVIM teams from local hosts, but when we do it tends to involve this issue. Discuss the issue of alcohol, tobacco, vaping, and drug use with your team, and let them know that drinking or smoking on the trip is a very serious offense. You should be prepared to send anyone who does not comply with this understanding home, at their expense. Adhering to this cultural expectation is not to be prudish, but—as always—we want to be culturally sensitive to the expectations placed upon us by the local church and our hosts.

Commissioning Service

Talk with your pastor about scheduling a commissioning service for your team. This service allows the rest of the congregation to feel a part of the mission, and it lets your team members know that they are going as emissaries of the congregation and representatives of Christ's church. This service is often a powerful one and sets the tone for the rest of the trip. A sample commissioning service for teams is included in the Appendix.

Traveling on Your Mission Journey

Confirm Travel Plans and Host Plans

Before you leave, be sure to confirm your travel, work, and lodging plans with your host. Make sure that your host very clearly understands what you will be doing, where you will be staying, what time you will be arriving, and how you will be getting around. Again, do not worry about offending the host by asking these questions. It is your job to be thorough so that nothing falls through the cracks.

Travel

As you approach your dates of travel, be in close communication with your team about preparations. Reiterate packing concerns, offer words of support, and make sure that if your team is traveling internationally, each team member has his or her passport.

On the day of departure, make sure to meet your team in plenty of time to make it through security (wait times are ever-increasing for international travel); you might consider having the team stay together the night before travel to make sure that everyone makes it to the airport, and on time. Some teams wear matching t-shirts, so they can be easily identified as a group.

Transportation

Be sure to arrange transportation with your host before you leave, including transportation from the airport. See if your host can provide you with a bus and driver for the length of your stay; if so, you will be able to transport your team together, and you will be supporting the project financially.

Initial Orientation

Once you arrive at the place you will be staying, gather your group for an initial orientation session. This is a time for them to pause after a hectic journey and prepare for the work ahead. If possible, have someone from the place you are staying give instructions on matters like showers, meals, and safety concerns.

It is also important to have orientation at the work site every morning. Have the construction foreman or supervisor talk through the day's work with your team, emphasizing safety. If everyone on the team has a good idea of what everyone else is doing, the work will go more smoothly, and no one will get hurt.

Money

It is important to keep an accurate record of money spent on the trip. Your financial supporters deserve to know how their money was spent and you as the team leader need to know where your money is going. Consider designating a team member (or two) as team treasurer and go over receipts and expenditures each day. Bring a receipt book with you for times when you do not receive a receipt. It is a good idea to divide the group cash among several responsible members of your team in the event of theft, pickpocketing or similar circumstances.

Many countries, especially in developing areas, do not accept credit cards; most do not accept traveler's checks, which come with high fees anyway. Before you travel, discuss money with your host. You will most likely be asked to bring project funds in cash. It is best to divide this money among your team members during travel. In some areas, ATMs are present and may be the best method of getting cash. Your host will have more information for you on the best way to obtain local currency.

Also, be sure to ask your host about guidelines for tipping. As you prepare your budget, you might want to include a line item for gratuities.

At some point, if possible, take the staff of the guest house or project site out for a meal at a local restaurant. In addition to treating those staff members who have helped you during your mission, you will get to know them in a new context. God is at work in these relationships; they are often among the most memorable of the mission journey.

Food

As team leader, it is important that you are aware of any dietary concerns your team members may have. Find out if you have any vegetarians or members with diabetes or food allergies. Be sure to discuss these concerns with your host before you travel, and make sure that your team can be accommodated. A jar of peanut butter is always a good thing for members of your team to pack, just in case.

Especially in international contexts—but in any project—there will be times when the food you are served does not fit with your normal diet. In some cultures, refusing food is considered a deep offense. Many people in other countries eat only one or two meals daily often without meat. The hosts sometimes sacrifice to provide the team with the best that they have. Please realize and appreciate the differences and eat what is placed before you by the hosts. Be gracious and adventurous...you might just like it!

Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. Do not eat anything you believe to be unsafe. Be sure to only eat things that have been peeled, cooked or washed in clean, filtered water. Because most teams work with experienced hosts, these problems are rare. Still, issues do come up from time to time, and you should be prepared to speak with your hosts as needed.

Health

Regardless of the precautions you take, a team member may get sick while traveling. Be sure to look out for the health and well-being of your team members, and if they need to take a day off to rest, make them take the day off to rest! Remember, you are in charge, and you have the responsibility for your team members. It is natural for team members to resist taking a day off work, but getting others sick, or getting sicker because of lack of rest, is counterproductive.

Discuss with your host about medical facilities near where you will be staying, in case of an emergency. Even remote areas often have emergency medical facilities, though the quality of these facilities varies greatly. Be sure to take this into account as you pack first aid and medical supplies for your team.

When you receive your insurance paperwork from UMVIM, WJ, take time to read it carefully. It will be sent to the team leader specified during the registration process via email a few days before you leave. If you are three business days from departing and have not received your insurance information, please call our office immediately. Keep a copy of each card with you but be sure that each team member receives a copy of their insurance ID card as well. Before you depart, provide them with a copy of the Schedule of Benefits, which is available for download on our website. In the certificate of coverage, you will find specific information about what is covered and how to make a claim. Note that both accidents and illnesses are covered. ***In order to make a claim, you must see a doctor during your dates of coverage. Should you or another team member need medical attention, do not wait until you get home to be seen!***

Communication

Internet access, while sometimes hard to come by, is becoming more and more common, even in developing countries. You may be able to find an internet café nearby to keep in touch with friends and family. If possible, have a team member keep a blog while you are traveling so that the church and your team's loved ones can stay informed of what the team is doing.

Still, it is important to discuss with your host what kinds of communication options are available. If necessary, rent or purchase a cell phone and keep it with you in case of an emergency. Usage rates on these phones can be quite high, so be careful when using it.

Worship

As Christians, we are called to find God in all places we go. Just as you are experiencing God in your work, you should expect to find God in your worship. Find time to worship with a local congregation, alongside the people with whom you are working. Your team will learn a lot about God and what it means to be a Christian in the area you are serving. Do not be surprised if you are called upon to speak during the service. Be ready with some kind words for your host or testimony about your own Christian journey.

Often, these worship services are much different from what we are used to in the United States. Pentecostalism, for instance, is an important part of Christianity in many developing countries. After worship, have a team meeting and discuss the service with your team. What was different? What did you like about the service? What made you uncomfortable?

Safety

Safety should be your number one concern once you arrive. Go over the obvious potential trouble spots with your team and any on-site people who will be working with your team. If you are working on a construction project, speak with the supervisor and let that person **know** that safety is of utmost importance. Be sure that your team does not engage in any unsafe construction practices.

Be sure to discuss with your team and your host personal safety when out and about. Your host will be able to tell you whether traveling outside the guesthouse or project site is appropriate

and how to avoid problems. No matter where you are, insist that team members travel in groups of at least two. Seasoned travelers may be hesitant to take your advice about personal safety, but it's always better to be safe than sorry.

Team Life and Cohesion

Everyone is unique, and your team members will reflect this in the way they work, orient with the site and interact with each other. Be sensitive to these differences and how you manage the team members. How team members interact can be emotional and spiritual. Use the daily reflection time for your team members to share insights, concerns, or observations. Explain to them that they might feel uncomfortable, homesick, or even broken. These experiences are pivotal in one's spiritual life and should be communicated and addressed. Be sure to address health concerns: is everyone hydrating and taking breaks? Remember that everyone needs some down time, so providing time to just hang out can help with team building and minimize stress.

Conflict Management

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV)

Jesus sets out a four-step process to be used when there is conflict in the church, and this process works well when used with UMVIM teams. Often, emotions run high because people can easily become exhausted, homesick, or overwhelmed, thus causing tempers to flare and tensions to rise. Take this into consideration. Also, be cautious since it is possible that you could be a contributor to any problems that occur.

Step 1: Address problems as they arise. If there is a problem with an individual on the team, first go to that individual and assess the problem. Beginning with a phrase like “You seem to be troubled by . . .” attempt to create an atmosphere of mutual trust. Praying together is often helpful in resolving problems.

Step 2: If the individual is openly criticizing you or if the team member is not opened to solving the problem with you alone, take another person along to help with the situation. Do some problem solving and creative thinking about ways both parties can work together to accomplish and advance the work of the team.

Step 3: If there is a problem that involves several team members or if the problem with an individual is one that requires some changes in attitudes or schedule for the team, take the problem-solving questions to the whole team. Be mindful of individual feelings but know that the team leader will make the final decision based on what is best for the host and majority of the team members.

Step 4: If the individual causing difficulties does not respond to the three-step process above, Jesus tells us to treat that person as he treated the tax collectors – with loving kindness and respect. Let the individual know through words and actions that despite differences that exist, they are a vital part of team.

Reflection

It is possible for team members to go on a mission journey and come back unchanged; it is rare that the opportunity is missed, but it does happen. However, if you as the team leader are intentional about scheduling time for reflection, both in a longer period and for a short time each day, none of your team members will miss the opportunity to reflect on what they have experienced on the journey. They will have their faith strengthened as a result.

Reflection can take several forms. During your daily team meetings (before the day's work, in the evening, or both), discuss with your team members what they have seen.

Facilitate discussion—or have someone designated to do this—around themes of service, poverty, evangelism, Christian love, or other themes you deem appropriate. Allow your team members, through discussion, to process what they have seen to help them grow in their faith.

Not everyone processes verbally, however. It is important to recognize that different people have different learning styles, and it is your responsibility as the team leader to see that all team members have ample opportunity to process what they have seen. In discussions, give your team members the opportunity to think through their responses, perhaps writing down thoughts before they speak, and be intentional about giving everyone equal opportunity to share.

Encouraging (or requiring!) team members to journal each day is a good way to ensure that all team members are thinking through the important issues always present on mission trips. Not all team members will find this a productive exercise, but it is a good way to help them prepare for your discussions.

In many ways, Christian mission is as much about inward change in your team members as it is about the work and service in which you engaged. Think of your mission journey as an extended lesson on how God is at work in the world. When we start to think of mission work both as service and as Christian education, we can begin to understand how God works through mission. Give your team members the opportunity to experience God in this way.

A Mission Journey: A Handbook for Volunteers offers some guidelines, questions, and material for your reflection sessions.

Farewell

Before you leave, have a farewell gathering with the people with whom you have been working. It is important for the spiritual development of the team—and the spiritual development of those on site—that you give them the opportunity to say goodbye in a meaningful way. A special prayer or meal are good ways to let those on the project site know how much they mean to you. Allow enough time for your team members to say their goodbyes to the people with whom they have worked. Understand, too, that unless your team has a long-term commitment to this site,

and as difficult as it may be, your team will probably not see these people again. Make sure your team members know that “I hope to see you again,” or “If you are ever in the United States, I hope you will visit us” means something very different in some contexts: that is, those who hear this promise take it as Gospel truth, rather than a platitude offered as a farewell. Make sure your team members do not unknowingly invite someone to their homes! Every word matters!

An on-site evaluation between team leader and host prior to departure is strongly encouraged. Have an informal discussion of the experience, discussing such things as what seemed to go well, what could have been done better, what impressions each person has, etc. Any financial negotiations still pending should be discussed and resolved.

Gifts

If you will be presenting gifts to your host or to those with whom you will be working—including clothes or other personal items brought by team members—understand that different cultures understand gifts differently. A safe way to offer gifts is to give them to a pastor or church leader with the instructions that the gifts are “for the church” and to be distributed as they deem appropriate. This way, the team can avoid creating unnecessary conflict among those on site. Some projects may want to celebrate these gifts with a ceremony during which the gifts are handed over; other projects prefer to do this distribution themselves. However, you offer gifts, be sure to respect the host’s wishes for how gifts will be presented. The purpose is not for your team members to feel good about what they have given; the purpose is for the gifts to truly be gifts, offered freely and without expectation.

Final Meeting

Hold one final meeting with your team before you leave the site, to gather impressions, discuss the experience, and prepare to travel home. Travel can be stressful, and if traveling *to* the mission site was not stressful enough, now you must return home much wearier than when you left. Make sure your team has everything together and has not left anything behind (unless you are leaving behind clothes, gifts, etc.). Mistakes are made when we are most tired, so make sure your team knows to stay together through the customs process, if applicable, as they prepare to go home.

Finally, have team members complete evaluations on the way home, while their impressions are still fresh. The evaluation is available for download from the WJ website or can be found in the Appendix.

Departure Tax (International Only)

Some countries require a departure tax in order to pass through customs and leave the country. Be sure you know about this requirement beforehand, and whether the tax must be paid in cash. If so, make sure your team knows (so that they can each have enough cash!) or keep cash with you and dole it out before arriving at the airport.

Returning Home

Reverse Culture Shock

Upon their return, your team members will probably experience reverse culture shock. If this is the first experience a team member has had leaving and return to his or her own culture, this could be especially true for him or her. Reverse culture shock is returning home and feeling strange about all the comforts we have, especially considering the comparably sparse conditions of those living in the project location. Reverse culture shock does not only happen with international mission! Speak with your team about reverse culture shock and let them know that this is a normal feeling. In fact, tell them to look out for it and, if possible, discuss the feeling after you return. This can be an excellent springboard to discussion, as it allows your team members to think through issues of poverty, health and living conditions.

Members of your team will experience a range of emotions. Some common responses to mission journeys are:

Elation: Your team members will be excited to share their “mountain top” experience with anyone who will listen to their story. Prepare the team for the fact that most people want to hear only a brief summary. Many missionaries feel slighted when this happens, but a productive way to channel this energy is to discuss the experience with other team members.

Depression: After being away from routine schedules and together experiencing close Christian community, everything changes immediately. This sudden change can lead to feelings of depression.

Guilt: Returning to more affluent circumstances may create feelings of guilt. Prepare your team members for this feeling and use these feelings as teaching moments.

Rejection: Team members may reject the UMVIM experience to cover their guilt or denial, or the church family that doesn't respond positively to them. Encourage these team members to view their mission experience in a positive way and help them see ways they can respond to these feelings productively.

Acceptance: People achieve acceptance of the experience when they choose to see it as a real, meaningful, and important time in their lives and begin plans for follow-up.

Reunion

The mission journey does not end when the team returns home. Be sure to schedule a reunion for your team. At the reunion, let the team tell stories, share pictures, and “remember” together the work that they did. This debriefing goes a long way towards helping your team members process their experience and it is a great way to share after returning home. You might consider having this off-site, or even doing a small retreat. If so, make sure to work this into your budget at the beginning of the planning process. If possible, use this time to discuss proactive steps that team members can make towards working for justice now that they have returned home. Look for ways to continue to engage in mission, through both staying connected with your host and somewhere in your community.

Evaluation

If you have not yet collected evaluations from your team members, be sure to do so when you return home and return them to your Annual Conference UMVIM Coordinator or the UMVIM, WJ Coordinator. Also, complete a team leader evaluation found in the Appendix or on the UMVIM website (www.umvimwj.com under *Resources*) and return it to your Conference or Western Jurisdiction Coordinator. These reports help us pass along important information to future teams. If you have any comments or concerns that need to be shared with UMVIM staff members, please feel free to contact us. Your experiences are a great resource for us, and we want to be able to share them with other team leaders.

Telling the Story

Work with your pastor to find time—in worship, or at another time—to present your team's experience to the church. The mission is part of the faith journey of the entire church, not just those who were able to travel on the actual trip. Showing pictures helps the church understand its role in the mission and telling stories and offering examples of how God was at work during the experience brings home the fact that God calls all Christians to mission. This is also a good time to explore issues of justice with the congregation. If worship time is not available, offer a dinner where donors and supporters can come see the good work that they have supported. It will not be possible for the team to adequately express their experience in words but offering a summary of the mission to your church family helps them see God at work.

Some guidelines for telling the story: give a brief overview of the mission, tell a personal story, explain future plans for the project, and express appreciation for support. Be positive and appreciative about the experience, but do not romanticize it. Be honest and sincere about the project's challenges, as well as its unique blessings. Discuss the ongoing needs of the church in the area you have served and offer ways to continue to support the church.

Send your story to your Annual Conference or WJ Jurisdictional Coordinator so they can be shared through their networks or on their websites.

Many people have been influenced by the opportunity to serve on your team, and many others may be influenced to become a volunteer in mission because of your story. Assign someone to write articles for church, district, conference, and jurisdiction newsletters and websites. A team member might want to continue a blog about the experience and ways to continue the mutual relationship with the project. Exposing more people to your story helps keep God's mission thriving.

Also, vital to God's mission is the identification and encouragement of new team leaders. Recognize and nurture individuals who exhibit leadership traits necessary for the success of an UMVIM mission. Encourage them to attend a team leader training in the annual conference. Equip these individuals and provide delegated duties that will enhance their abilities and knowledge. Be willing to mentor and coach them on a future team so that they, too, can experience the unique blessings of being a team leader.

Above all, celebrate the good work that has been done in God's name. You, your team, and your church community have fulfilled God's call to be Christian love in action!