

## THE ADDENDUM

There is a downside to mission volunteerism. Every mission organization has stories of disastrous volunteer experiences that include **people not being adequately prepared**, of groups destructively **pushing their own agendas**, and of **inappropriate behavior** that set back a church's witness. Volunteer mission can be done in ways that **obscure important, long-term mission goals**. Some trips are **over-hyped in terms of what can be accomplished** or what has been done in one or two weeks. Short-term mission can **mistakenly be presented as the primary way** the Great Commission will be fulfilled. Sometimes, short-term mission participants **do not really comprehend** that they are **just one link** in a chain of evangelism, discipleship, and church planting events. Short-term mission participants may erroneously think they are the **all-important climax of a project rather than the seed-planting**. That opens up things to the danger of letting the desire to accomplish something **visible here and now** be what determines the overall mission agenda. It is not uncommon for short-termers to express disappointment that they did not "accomplish" more. What they have failed to see is that the changes in themselves and the accomplishments on the field tend to be in **small increments rather than paradigm-shifting revolutions**.

With short-term mission activity there is also a significant risk of **creating dependency attitudes** within the receiving church. There is the danger of **amateurization of a mission strategy**, where priorities and programs wind up being determined by people with little training or cultural sensitivity and only limited experience on a given mission field. Sometimes, that desire for highly visible results has even led to the creation of an **almost artificial "need"** so that volunteers will have something to do. Because there are always so many new people coming in to short-term mission, the perpetual doing of very elementary training can make it seem like the wheel is having to be re-invented every two weeks.

On occasion, self-centeredness, paternalism or ethnocentrism causes short-term mission volunteers to **do things without the knowledge** of or **against the wishes of the host church**, necessitating damage control and even an occasional complete re-doing of construction projects after the group leaves. Some short-termers have signed up thinking they were **going on a sightseeing trip** that would have a little spiritual flavoring. Other people go on short-term trips **seeking the emotional rewards** of their own hands-on involvement rather than looking for ways to **invest in long-term empowerment**.

Participants sometimes go on a trip **primarily because a friend is going**. The participants of two-week mission trips must not be exalted as the **star players in world evangelism**. While the overall impact of short-term mission has been significant, there have been some "excursion missionaries" created **who feel that tremendous fulfillment of the Great Commission has occurred because they made a two-week trip**

somewhere, a feeling that is a slap in the face to missionaries giving decades of their life to global mission.

For these and other reasons, going on a mission trip is not a positive experience for every participant or even every group or team. Sadly, a few even come home embittered by the experience. Sometimes there is bad team chemistry and people return home upset at each other. Sometimes there are clashes with field missionaries or national leaders that do not get satisfactorily resolved. Sometimes there is inappropriate behavior on the part of team members occasioning the need to send someone home early.

As the movement began gathering momentum one concern was voiced that has turned out to be less of a problem than was feared. In those early years, there was concern that such trips would drain money away from other mission needs. That has not happened in the way people feared because most of the people going on short-term mission do not pay for trips with money they planned to give to missions; they use their own "vacation" money. So, people wanting to conjecture how that one to four billion dollars could be "better spent" need to realize that this is not money that would be given to global mission if short-term mission trips were abolished tomorrow. In many cases, short-term mission has increased mission giving as people come home burdened for specific projects or ministries.

- Chuck Gailey and Howard Culbertson