

Community Bible Church

Short Term Missions Policy

Introduction

Because short term missions is not a term used explicitly in the Bible, it is not so easy to define. Like any term, its meaning carries many associations in the modern evangelical world. For some, short term missions means sending a group of young people for one week to Mexico to help build houses. For others, it is associated with more of an exploratory trip, in which a group of college kids are sent out under a mission agency for six weeks in the summer to serve in another country and get a firsthand taste of overseas missions. After defining “short term missions” from the Bible, we will state the objective for sending people from our church on such mission trips, and then list the qualifications for both leaders and participants.

A Biblical Definition of Short Term Missions

Examples of “short term missions” in the Bible take the form of specific “ministry” assignments from the Lord, whether as a normal component of discipleship or as specific ministries of supporting other missionary workers.

1. Short Term Mission trips are a normal outworking of discipleship in the local church

Rather than presented as a separate “program,” short term missions as ministry assignments flow out of the normal discipleship mindset of a church obedient to the Lordship of Christ. By definition, a disciple-making church is committed to the advance of the Gospel locally and around the world. Serving as disciples of the Lord Jesus involves a willingness to do any task for His Name. Not only did Jesus spend time teaching His disciples, He modeled everything that He taught. He entrusted them with responsibilities. In the Gospels, we find Christ delegating specific assignments to His disciples. These short term assignments were integrally related to Jesus’ ongoing discipleship of the twelve and not designated under a “special” category. Robert Coleman’s *The Master Plan of Evangelism* describes this essential component of Christ’s model of discipleship as “delegation.” Interestingly enough, Christ did not send the disciples on a major mission immediately. Rather he gave small, practical assignments. However, three of the gospels record the time when Jesus assigns their first “short term mission” and then asks them to give a report when they had completed the task: “He called unto Him twelve, and began to send them forth” (Mark 6:7; Matt. 10:5; Luke 9:1,2). Coleman notes that one essential definition of a disciple is that they see themselves as “sent out in the same work of world evangelism to which the Lord was sent, and for which He gave His life ... It is the commission of the church which gives meaning to all else that is undertaken in the Name of Christ. With this purpose clearly in focus, everything which is done and said has glorious fulfillment of God’s redemptive purpose” (92).

2. Short Term Missions trips are a vital aspect of the local church's support of their missionary partners and commitment to be co-workers in the spread of the Gospel.

In addition to discipleship outreach opportunities, short term missions and projects serve as a support role for partners in the gospel. Strengthening Christ's body around the world through teaching or serving gifts is tied to the realization that we are all one Body in Christ. The grace to serve and gives comes from Christ, and is channeled to others when we lay down our lives for our brethren as Jesus Himself commands every disciple. While this call to serve one another is expressed in a local church through every member exercising His gift in the Spirit to edify each other locally, the outworking of these gifts to our partners overseas is one clear testimony of the breadth of Christ's redemptive work. Paul's desire to visit Rome was tied to his overall commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles; however, in expressing his desire to visit the believers in Rome, he first expresses his desire to serve them: "For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established" (Rom. 1:11).

The consistent testimony of Paul's missionary work is his recognition that his ministry was not an isolated responsibility, but was carried out through the means of different helpers at different times and from different churches. First and foremost, were co-missionaries that traveled with him during his missionary journeys. Timothy, for example, was Paul's disciple from an earlier trip, but his relationship with Timothy was formed by periods of co-laboring together. One of many examples is Acts 19:22: "And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while." The word for "minister" here is the same word used for deacons: waiting on tables. These men were serving Christ specifically through their ministry to Paul. The diversity of churches represented by those serving with Paul is made explicit in Acts 20:4: "And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia." The church at Rome is explicitly mentioned as a church that Paul expected to help him fulfill his ministry in Spain: "Whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while--" Christ's joint mission focuses and unites their fellowship on accomplishing Christ's work.. The final chapter of Romans provides an extensive list of those who served as Paul's "fellow workers in Christ Jesus."

The church at Rome was not the only church that shared such gospel "fellowship." The Philippian Epistle reveals a deep commitment on the part of the church to support Paul and the gospel work. One outworking of their love for Paul was sending Epaphraditus to minister to Paul while he was in prison. His ministry a "messenger and minister to my need" is a striking illustration of how Christ compels his church to "life-and-blood" service of each other. In recognizing his "short term" ministry, Paul states, "because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking your service to me" (Phil. 2:30). The phrase "what was lacking in your service" is tied in the context to the personal service that Epaphraditus extended to Paul in person. Whereas the entire church is not able to minister in person to Paul, by sending one of their own, we

see a tangible expression of sacrificial love on both the part of the church and the one they sent. Short term trips, if possible, should be structured around our commitment to sustain long-term commitments and relationships with our partners around the world.

The Objective for Sending Short Term Missions Teams

To gladly and sacrificially obey Christ's commission flows from an apprehension of the glory of God and the worth of His Son. His glory is the overarching objective for any short term or long term ministry: We go out for the sake of Christ's Name. However, as we saw above, there are two specific ways in which short term missions trips glorify Christ: First, short term mission trips are a normal outgrowth of fulfilling the command to make disciples. Secondly, short term mission trips are a normal outgrowth of our commitment to co-labor with our missionaries in the glorious work of redemption. Having biblically defined short term missions as both an outreach arm of discipleship and a support arm of missions leads us to see the primary objective of short term missions as gospel partnership. That is, sending teams are a vital means to expand our view of Christ's work around the world, to minister tangibly in teaching or serving to our partners in Gospel ministry, and to develop lasting relationships on the field.

The commitment and willingness to serve in this way acknowledges, first and foremost, that we do not set the agenda for any short term missionary assignment; Christ has that exclusive right! The danger of "missions" becoming a program is diminished when we continually remember to sustain our relationships with our missionaries with a commitment to serve them in their needs. This prevents the local church from just maintaining a roster of missionary names that no one really knows except on an occasional basis. Trips provide firsthand reports of the fruit being produced through the church's sacrificial service and giving at home. The testimony of Christ building His church through conversions and answered prayer and through the feeding of His sheep are vital in bringing glory to Christ and sustaining a mission-mindset at home. The results of our publications and leadership training and the pastor's conferences are seen in the changed lives of individuals who are saved by Christ, who are being taught by His Word, and are living as servants of our Lord.

The short-term mission project is thus not an end in itself. The biblical emphasis on co-laboring and partnering in the Gospel requires us, then, to keep short term missions focused on continuing long-term relationships on the field as the Lord gives us the opportunities.

Strategic missions partnerships are formed when a local church makes an ongoing, long-term commitment to being a vital and strategic partner with other workers and churches. **Short Terms Teams play a vital role in strategic missions partnership** Each short-term trip should serve to strengthen our long-term partnership commitment by emphasizing the following key components:

1. Informed and timely intercession for the partners on the field. Trips should be bathed in prayer, both in seeking the Lord's will for each trip, and for the lasting fruit that will result from abiding in Christ.

2. Adequate preparation and frequent communications go hand in hand before and after the trip. When the parties are together on the field or in the local church, it is a time of true friendship, joy and celebration. The fellowship is characterized by the excitement and unity that occurs when people are bound together by a common goal of proclaiming Christ and advancing the Gospel in the world.
3. Short-term mission projects are designed to meet long-term, strategic needs on the field. Thus, priority for trips will target specific requests from the missionaries themselves.
4. Financial giving designated for missions becomes personalized as the church sends teams to meet specific needs.
5. Although specific tasks may be targeted to meet needs, the priority must be to foster ministry relationships that foster an attitude of co-laboring with Christ to extend the Gospel to the unreached peoples of the earth. We are to serve one another and love sacrificially as Christ commanded us.

Qualifications and Approval for Short Term Participants

Requirements

Because short term missions are an extension of the ongoing ministry and service of discipleship, one must be a saved disciple of the Lord Jesus and a member of CBC faithfully serving in the local church.

Commitment

The preparation for a short term trip will demand a commitment to attend all training meetings that the leader schedules. Financially, we expect team members to provide a minimum of 10% of the total trip cost, the balance raised through financial support of believers.

Responsibility

The ministry responsibilities on the field are similar to the member's ministries at CBC. All team members should display a servant attitude to serve even in an undesirable ministry that may come up on the field.

Approval Process

Each participant must complete a short term missions application when an opportunity for a short term trip arises. The missions leadership team will prayerfully review the application and make a recommendation to the CBC elders for final approval.