

LCMS BEST PRACTICES in Short-Term Mission



1. Be invited

Are you a guest or an intruder? Understand clearly, in writing, if your invitation is coming from those of the local or national church who have authority to invite you. Confirm that they thoroughly consulted and received a blessing from their own partners and ecclesiastical supervisors?

- › If you believe you have been invited by the proper channels, you are well on your way. Please keep reading.
- › If you do not believe you have been invited, there are several steps you can take.
 - You can search the LCMS database for short-term opportunities that have been requested by our national partners and missionaries.
 - You can request that your contact work through the proper channels before you proceed with planning your mission trip.
 - You can contact the LCMS to learn more about the country in which you are hoping to serve at 888-THE LCMS (843-5267) or BecomeAMissionary@lcms.org.

2. Be known

Transparency is essential. Do not accept an invitation until you have communicated with the local missionary, mission team leader or LCMS regional/area director that you have been invited and have clearly explained the purpose and duration of your visit. Also, if there is any question, ask for his or her assistance in understanding the clarity of your role while also receiving his or her blessing for your visit. Be sure to communicate clearly with the host church the need for such communication about the mission so the national church might also grow in its understanding that such practice is necessary for the sake of the sending church remaining faithful to its own polity and accountability structures. Neither the approved leaders of the national

church nor the LCMS mission representatives can be excluded from the dialogue.

- › Be known by registering your trip at this link: thelcms.wufoo.com/forms/shortterm-mission-trip-registration/

3. Be approved

Since your LCMS district, congregation, mission team or LCMS Recognized Service Organization will represent the LCMS while serving and/or funding a mission project of the Lord on an international mission field where there is a partner national church or an emerging national church, it is both vital and beneficial to be approved by the LCMS for such service. It has been and remains the agreed bylaw practice of the LCMS Board for International Mission to serve as the only sending agency through which workers and funds are sent to foreign mission areas of the Synod. The LCMS Office of International Mission and the Church Relations office will provide an invaluable connection to the indigenous national church body or emerging church body that is responsible for the work in the mission field. LCMS approval also will enable your LCMS district, congregation, mission team or LCMS Recognized Service Organization to receive useful cultural and spiritual information about the mission field, U.S. State Department alerts and/or warnings, access to the experienced guidance of the available local LCMS mission staff in the field and LCMS evacuation insurance. Approval by the LCMS for your short-term mission activity creates strong bonds with the LCMS' partner church bodies internationally and emerging church bodies. Your cooperation in receiving LCMS approval is a gift to global church body relationships in advancing the saving Good News of Jesus Christ.

- › How do you know if you are approved? Notification will be sent to the contact listed on your registration form with a copy to your district representative.

4. Be properly sent

Being properly sent means that you are being sent by Christ and His Church and not severed from Him in your going. Christ sends and calls through the Church, mediately, not immediately. The question you should ask yourself is: Has the

U.S. church with which you are affiliated, i.e. LCMS, district or local congregation understood and given a blessing to your visit? If you are an individual, has your pastor, upon proper inquiry with the LCMS district and Synod offices, given his counsel and blessing? Even a short-term trip needs such coordination since great harm can occur in a short period of time if a lack of information leads to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and unnecessary offense and division.

- › If you have received an email notification that you are approved, you are then properly sent. Your district has been notified that you will be serving with the approval of the LCMS offices of International Mission and Church Relations.
- › If you have NOT received confirmation that your trip has been approved, you should suspend your planning.
- › If you have been notified that your trip is not approved, follow the instructions received in your follow-up email communications.
- › For questions, please contact the LCMS offices of International Mission or Church Relations.

5. Be informed

How well do you know the setting of your work in terms of the history of the mission, the history of the national church, and the local church's strategy and goals? Do not think that since the church partner is poor, it does not deserve or expect the best from partners coming from the LCMS. Consider that just as mission at home in your community cannot be undertaken without proper training or without proper understanding of your local context, so it is also in the foreign field. Consult the materials available to be properly informed about the mission, national church and country you are visiting.

- › LCMS country pages: lcms.org/international
- › CIA country pages: cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook
- › Short-term team training: lcms.org/service

6. Be realistic

Understanding the mission or church you are visiting, its history, complexities and mission vision might necessitate greatly limiting your expectations in order to avoid disappointments. These disappointments can result in anxiety

for you, the mission, the national church and especially those who are new to the faith. You are not a leader there, but a servant to both the national church and the mission. You should always be aligned with and subject to its goals of having a shared practice and vision. Have local leaders frame desired outcomes in consultation with experienced missionaries in the local setting.

7. Be safe

How well do you understand the local health, political or social risks associated with the country? Do you have health insurance? Does your life insurance policy have clauses nullifying coverage if entering a "red zone" country or a particular part of the globe that is considered at risk? This can change from day to day. Are you physically and emotionally able to deal with the stress and challenges of international travel in a strange and different environment where usual comforts or medical attention might be absent?

- › U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov
- › U.S. State Department: state.gov

8. Be effective

How well do you know or understand the culture, its nuances, the language and the relationships at work? As in the United States, evangelism requires relationship building. Cross-cultural curiosities and acquaintances are fast and easy. Cross-cultural relationships are exceedingly difficult and are built over time. Time is necessary for establishing trust, an essential ingredient in effective evangelism. These complex, yet exciting relationships are seldom understood by new or even seasoned missionaries, much less understood or established in short-term mission trips. Respect rather than supplant the local office of the ministry or missionary by understanding your limitations as a visitor, even if frequent. Accept the direction and constructive criticism since they will live with the consequences of gifts, goods or services being offered by you or your group. Be prepared to ask many questions, without always understanding the answers.

- › You will receive a debriefing form upon your return if you have registered your trip with the LCMS. This will give you an opportunity to ask questions about things you did not understand and give you a chance to evaluate your effectiveness.
- › The local missionary also will be given a chance to offer insights on the effectiveness of your service through a debriefing form. Relevant information will be shared with you and your LCMS district office.

9. Be Lutheran

Do not do any type of work that might be misunderstood or contrary to our confession and sound practice. Humbly walk with your sending church (and the LCMS), the missionary/missionaries, and the local national church and pastors in a way that is in harmony with our clear confessions of the Gospel in a ministry that is likely suffering attacks and onslaughts beyond our understanding. Mission is messy. Don't underestimate the complicated nature of theological work and the potential long-term consequences of your visit. Core values and principles of doctrine and practice are essential in all places, but especially in the mission field. You might not be able to commune, for example, if the ministry you are visiting is still an emerging, rather than a full partner ministry of the LCMS. Do not participate in Word and Sacrament with heterodox bodies or heterodox local churches at any time, but especially in a context that might bring great harm and setbacks to the efforts of partners in that region that are struggling to establish a sustainable, orthodox Lutheran presence. Do not exercise the public Office of the Ministry in any way unless with full blessing of a full partner local church and local mission, and in full conformity with orthodox Lutheran doctrine and practice. Consult with the national leaders and mission staff regarding the appropriate materials or resources to be used.

- › Link to Article VI: bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php

10. Be committed

Before, during and long after your trip, pray for and support with your offerings the work in that partner or emerging partner church body, as well as the called missionaries working there through established, recognized and accountable channels of support. When you have completed your trip, be sure to complete the debriefing form. Do not pretend to be a help if your involvement is only a trip once a year or once every couple of years while forgetting about the day-to-day needs of that church. True partnerships must be developed and maintained over long periods with careful planning in order to sustain work. All partners must be aware of the need for the best possible stewardship of resources in a growing, demanding global mission. Consider how you can help raise awareness, prayer support and funds for the partner church and mission through the proper channels of Synod support for years into the future.

Suggested Reading

- › *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, And How to Reverse It* by Robert D. Lupton
Available at amazon.com
- › “Misguided missions: Ten worst practices” by Mark Wm. Radecke in *The Christian Century*
christiancentury.org/article/2010-05/misguided-missions
- › Office of International Mission
lcms.org/service