

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission



Preparing for the Journey

A Devotional Guide for Teams

INSPIRE

INFORM

INTERACT

Preparing for the Journey

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christians have been a missionary people – that is, Christians have felt God calling them to take the gospel throughout the world. Jesus commands us to do this.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” – Matthew 28:19-20a

Throughout the ages, Christians have responded faithfully to Jesus’ commandment. Paul insisted that God’s grace was for all, for Jews and Greeks, and became one of the first missionaries to travel all over the region. The theologian and physician Albert Schweitzer gave up a lucrative medical practice to share Jesus’ love with those who could not afford medical treatment. Mother Theresa gave her life to serve orphans and the “least of these” throughout Calcutta, India.

The history of Christian Mission has been a mixed bag, however. For every Mother Theresa, we have stories of Christians from the West forcing Africans and Native Americans to convert to Christianity at gun point. Many times, mission became an excuse to justify the control, exploitation, and enslavement of peoples throughout the world. Wars have been fought in the name of Christian Mission. People have been burned at the stake and killed in the name of Christian Mission.

It seems that Jesus has entrusted us with a very dangerous tool in commanding us to be in mission to the world. When used rightly, mission has brought life and hope to millions of people all over the world. And when used wrongly, mission has brought death and grief to millions of people as well. We have a tremendous responsibility then to prepare ourselves to be the kind of missionaries Christ would have us to be. Nothing is more important in this process than understanding our motivations and goals for doing mission work.

This booklet seeks to help those working through Volunteers in Mission to do just that, to gain a Biblical and Christ-centered understanding of why we do mission and what mission should look like. Because this booklet seeks to promote a Biblical model of mission, it should be used like a Bible study. This is not a “how to” booklet in terms of explaining the logistics of being part of mission teams. Rather this booklet seeks to foster the spiritual formation and development for those who are participating in these experiences. Of course, the experience itself is most important. Everyone I know who has participated in a mission experience has been impacted spiritually through that experience. This booklet merely seeks to aid the spiritual formation that is already taking place. Part I of the booklet will be a series of Bible studies designed for spiritual preparation before the mission experience. Part II provides a guide for reflecting during the mission experience. This part is much more general than Part I as the reflections should be guided by the experiences of the trip. God always works in strange and mysterious ways, so it would be quite foolish for us to try to guess how God’s Spirit will move in each experience. Finally, Part III will be a guide for debriefing from a mission experience. Each session will have reflections on Scripture, stories to illumine the Scripture, and questions for discussion. All of the discussion questions are in italics. If time does not permit using all the questions, it will be up to the leader to choose which questions are the most important.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to keep a journal from this point until you return. Often times, writing down our thoughts is one of the most important spiritual disciplines we can practice to foster our spiritual formation. For each session, there will be a list of suggested journal topics. But do not feel limited to these. Be open to the Spirit’s leading and if you feel the need to focus your journal time on an entirely different topic, then please do so. The last thing this booklet should do would be to confine the movement of the Spirit in your hearts and lives.

Grace and Peace to you as you serve Christ through this mission experience.

PART I
PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

BEING SENT – Session 1
“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” – John 20:21

Jesus tells us that we are sent in the same manner that he was sent, or in other words, we are sent to do the same things Jesus did.

What are the things Jesus did? (For example, Jesus healed, Jesus welcomed children, etc.)

Our first rule of thumb in doing missions, then, is to constantly ask this question, “Are we doing the things Jesus did?” A case study can help us see the danger of failing to constantly ask this question in our mission work.

Rwanda: A Case Study

In 1994, nearly 1,000,000 people were killed in about 2 months in Rwanda. This was the most effective and efficient genocide in the history of the world. And at the time, Rwanda was the most “Christian” country in the world, with 85% of its inhabitants professing faith in Christ.¹ Clearly, for many in Rwanda, Christianity had nothing to do with the life and teaching of Jesus. We must ask, “What went wrong?”

In Rwanda, there are basically two ethnic groups: The Hutu and the Tutsi. They basically lived together peacefully before European colonization and “Christian” mission work. When the Germans and Belgians colonized the country, they set up Tutsis as overseers and enslaved the Hutus, who were the vast majority of the population. It was the Tutsis who were required to whip the Hutus and exercise control over them.² The arrival of Christianity in Rwanda was very closely tied to the arrival of colonialism. The German and Belgium colonialists recognized that, in order to rule Rwanda using a very small number of their own troops, they would need to divide the Rwandans and develop a dominant and a subordinate group. The Christian Church provided the ideology for this division. Recognizing that the Tutsi were taller than the Hutu, the colonialists declared that Tutsis were part of the Hamitic race, or those who descended from Noah’s son Ham, who migrated to Rwanda and subdued and conquered the Hutus.³ The Tutsi came to be seen as “European in black skin.”⁴ The missionaries quickly set up mission schools where they could prepare the Tutsi to lead the country, thus providing the needed stability for colonial exploitation. One of the missionary reports from 1927 stated, “With the Tutsi Christians the missionaries hope to achieve the creation and formation of a social elite that is pro-European. Such an elite is needed. Christianity will provide it.”⁵ Therefore, from the very beginning, the missionaries decreed that religion would be the vehicle for political power. It would convert the Tutsis and appoint them as the ruling elite. In turn, the Tutsi would closely follow the orders of their “white fathers.”

This “Christian” method of colonization set up tremendous division between the Hutus and Tutsis. Eventually, the Hutus gained political power, and, in 1994, they began a systematic campaign to kill every Tutsi.

How did the missionary work of the Europeans contribute to the genocide?

What were the Europeans’ motivations and purposes for doing mission work in Rwanda?

¹ Michael Budde, “Pledging Allegiance,” *The Church as Counterculture*, ed. Michael Budde and Robert Bromlow, (Albany: State University of New York Press), 215.

² Tharcisse Gatwa, “Revivalism and ethnicity: The Church in Rwanda,” *Transformation* (April, 1998), 6.

³ Tharcisse Gatwa, “Victims or Guilty?” *International Review of Mission*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches), 350-351.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 353.

What were some of the things the missionaries did that were not in accordance with the things Jesus did?

What would Jesus' way of mission have looked like in Rwanda?

What does this example teach us as we are about to enter into a mission experience?

The Europeans who evangelized Rwanda viewed those in Africa as godless heathens who should be so grateful to receive the gospel, that they would become slaves and serve the European countries. In reality, these so called "heathens" lived peacefully with one another until the "Christians" came and taught them "Christianity." While the very worst short term mission trip would not have the same effects as years of missionary work in support of colonialism, the story of Rwanda teaches us that we must be clear about our motivations and purposes for serving as short term missionaries.

Are we going to convert the "godless heathens" or are we going to experience life with our brothers and sisters across the world?

Are we going to help the poor people who can't help themselves or are we going to form relationships and solidarity with God's children in another place?

In addition to being clear about our motivations and purposes, we must also be clear about what we are going to do. Jesus gave the disciples certain tasks when he sent them out.

Sent to Witness

Acts 1:8 "And you will be my witnesses in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth."

Typically, we tend to associate witnessing with evangelism. And many people tend to associate evangelism with "saving souls." A typical evangelistic experience for many might sound something like this:

Person 1: "Have you ever accepted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?"

Person 2: "Well, I've been going to church most of my life, and I believe in God and everything."

Person 1: "But have you accepted Christ? You see the Bible says that the only way to have forgiveness of sins is to accept Christ as our personal Savior. Let me ask you, if you died tonight, where would you go? Would you be in heaven or hell?"

Person 2: "Well, I guess I'm not sure. I mean I would want to go to heaven."

Person 1: "You can be sure! Just pray this prayer with me..."

There are several problems with this kind of evangelism. First, it uses fear to convince people to have faith in Christ. There is not one example in any of the gospels where Jesus scared someone into following him. Secondly, this method of evangelism promotes selfish reasons for professing faith. Jesus asks us to, "Deny yourselves and take up your cross" (Mk 8: 34). If the only reason we accept Christ is because we want to go to heaven, then we've missed the whole point of the gospel. Finally, this method of evangelism claims to know more than we as humans can know. To claim that there is only one way to God means that we are claiming to know the mind of God. God is so big that God is not confined to the boxes we set up. C.S. Lewis reminds us that we may indeed be surprised to see some of the people we find in heaven.⁶

When we evangelize in this way, we make the focus all about the other person. "**You** need to accept Christ... **you** need to repent... **you** need to pray this prayer."

⁶ For more information on Lewis' understanding of heaven and hell, read "The Last Battle," in the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

To witness, though, means that we share with others what God has done in our lives. We are witnesses to **our** experience of God's work in the world. And the first way we witness is in how we live. We live differently because of what Christ has done for us. To witness means that people should see the love of Christ in us. What people see in us is far more important than what they hear from us. And when we witness with our lives, then our words will have more meaning. When others can **see** what God has done in our lives, then they will be willing to **hear** what God has done for us. Therefore evangelism is no longer about, "You need to do this." Rather, a Biblical model of evangelism says, "This is the love of God that I have experienced in my life and you can experience that same love as well."

"Preach the gospel always...if necessary, use words." – St. Francis of Assisi

Mike's Witness

Mike is one of the most powerful witnesses for the transforming power of the gospel that I know. For over twenty years, he was a drug addict. In remembering life in addiction, Mike says that everything he did was controlled by drugs. His whole life was about getting his next hit – that is until God saved him. His children started going to church, and Mike went by the congregation to check on his kids, and the next thing he knows, he's talking with Pastor Lewis about the healing power of the gospel. Today, Mike is one of the leaders in the drug recovery program where he found healing, he works for Urban Ministry and supervises work teams that paint houses for low-income people, and he tells anyone willing to listen about what God has done in his life.

For Mike, witnessing is about sharing with others what God has done for him. He doesn't point the finger, he doesn't tell others what they should do, he doesn't try to scare people. He simply says, "This is what God has done for me." And Mike knows that when people see what God has done in his life, they will realize that God longs for them to be made whole as well. He says, "The natural human instinct is if God did this for him, then God can do it for me." And God has done it for many people through Mike's witness. Hundreds of people have found healing from their drug addiction through the program that Mike now leads.

Mike is an example of a true witness for Christ. He knows that the way he lives is the strongest witness he can give. He says, "When I was using drugs, I worked 24/7 for the drug dealer. My life was about getting \$10 so I could get more drugs. Why can't I be like that for the Lord? If I could give all of myself to drugs, then I can give all of myself to the Lord." And because Mike gives all of himself to the Lord, others have experienced the healing power of the gospel and given themselves to the Lord as well.

How would you describe your experience of God?

What are some meaningful ways that people have witnessed to you?

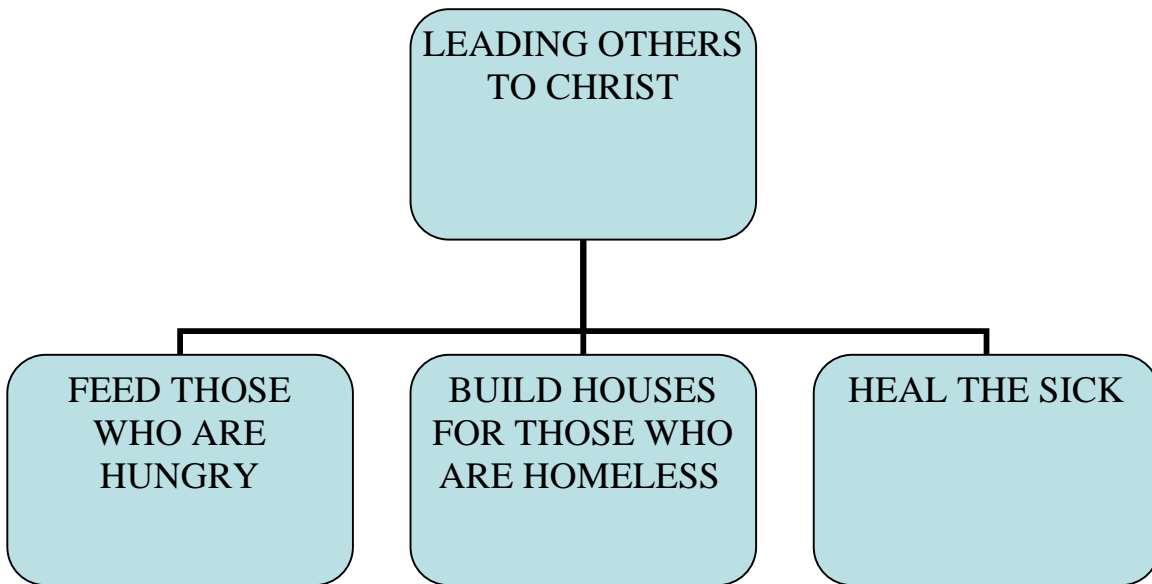
How can you be a witness on this coming mission experience?

Sent to Serve

Read Mt 25: 31-46

According to this passage, how do we know if we are truly followers of Christ?

It is interesting that Jesus only mentions actions. No where in this passage does he tell us to tell people about him or to evangelize. Often, service is seen as a means to an end. Some of the conventional thinking is that we serve so that we can build relationships of trust so that we can convert people to faith in Christ. The model would look something like this:



This model, that views service as a means to an end, however, is not Biblical. James says, “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?” (James 2:15-16). Jesus never had ulterior motives for healing people. He did not heal people so that they would become his followers. He healed people because God sent him to heal...just like God sent him to call people to follow him. In the same way, our service to others must be an end in itself. It is not a way to manipulate people into accepting Christ.

How did Jesus demonstrate serving others throughout his life?

What are some of the ways we can serve on this mission opportunity?

Sent to Love

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” – John 13:34

In mission trips, we often feel we are sent to work. We are there to feed people or to build houses or to work in a field. Many times, it is easy to let the work blind us to what God really cares about: people.

Read Mark 5:25-34

The gospels tell of an encounter Jesus had with a woman who had been suffering for twelve years. This encounter, though, was unplanned. Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ house, a very important place. Jairus was a leader of the synagogue whose daughter was ill. He needed Jesus’ help, and Jesus was on the way to heal her. But Jesus’ journey was interrupted. Out of the crowd this woman, whose name we do not even know, made her way to Jesus and touched his cloak and immediately was healed. But then Jesus did something very strange; he asked who touched him. Have you ever wondered why Jesus asked? The woman was healed. Wasn’t Jesus’ work done? Apparently not. While this woman had been healed physically, she was still broken emotionally and spiritually. For 12 years she had been unclean. No one could touch her; no one could show her love. It was not enough for Jesus to simply heal her physically. Jesus wanted to let her know that he cared about what she was going through. Jesus took the time to love her and to form a relationship with her. He called her daughter, making her part of God’s family and reintroducing her into community.

In doing mission work, we must let love guide everything we do. It is important to do work, to build houses for people, to serve food, to labor physically. But it is just as important, maybe more important, to build relationships, to be in community and solidarity with those we serve.

“There is more hunger in the world for love and appreciation than for bread.” – Mother Theresa

What are some of the most important relationships in your life?

How have you experienced love and appreciation through relationships with others?

How can we let love guide our service and witness on this mission experience?

How can you open yourself in this mission to be fully present as Jesus was to this woman? What do you need to change in yourself to transcend the need to do and instead, be?

Suggested Journal Topics

- 1) Any of the discussion questions listed above.
- 2) Why are you going on this mission trip?
- 3) What is Missions to you?
- 4) How can I be fully present to those around me as Jesus was for this woman?

GRACE 101 – Session 2

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” – Ephesians 2:8

The story of grace is central to the message of the gospel and it is central to our theology as United Methodists. John Wesley stressed that God’s grace was prevenient. Or, in other words, God’s grace is bestowed upon all of us even before we realize it. God’s grace is present everywhere and upon every person. And yet, we often live as if God’s grace is something we have to earn or something we can control.

Read John 4:1-26

What had the Jews told the woman at the well about worship? How did grace fit into their understanding of worship?

What did Jesus tell her about the kind of worship that God desires? How did grace fit into Jesus’ model of worship?

WHAT’S YOUR GRACE MODEL?

Limited Grace

Those who told this woman that she must worship in Jerusalem had a limited understanding of God’s grace. For them, God was confined to a particular place, the temple in Jerusalem. With this model, they were able to be the gatekeepers, that is, they could set the rules as to who could receive grace. Notice what the woman says, “You say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” She had been told where she must go to receive God’s grace. But this model of grace not only involves location. For her to go to worship in Jerusalem, she would be worshipping in the temple. And there were certain rules that people had to follow to be allowed to enter the temple. Because this woman was a Samaritan, she was automatically rejected. She was considered unclean – not fit to enter the temple – not fit to receive God’s grace. In this model, God’s grace was reserved for some, but not for all. God’s grace was for the “chosen people” and not for Samaritans. This was a limited view of grace.

What are some of our attitudes toward this mission experience that might reflect a limited grace model?

This model of limited grace is at work when we, those who are doing mission work, view ourselves to be, in some way, superior to those we are going to serve. This model says, “There but for the grace of God, go I.” When we say similar statements, we may mean that we are thankful that we do not suffer from extreme poverty, that we have clean drinking water, that we have a roof over our head, etc. But the underlying assumption behind that statement is that God loves us more. God has shown more grace to me than to other people.

Those who follow this model say, “We are going to take Jesus to them.” We may mean that we are going to share Jesus’ love with those we are going to serve, but again the underlying assumption is that Jesus’ love is a commodity that we control and can distribute out to those to whom we chose to give it. It’s the same as the Jews saying that God must be worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. They were claiming ownership of God’s grace and the authority to determine who was worthy to receive it. The woman at the well fell outside their grace model.

Jesus operates on a different model.

Extravagant Grace

Where does Jesus say is the location of true worship?

Under Jesus' model, are there gatekeepers to God's grace?

Jesus says that God is not limited to a particular place or to the rules of human gatekeepers. Rather true worship is done in "spirit and in truth," or in other words, true worship is something that comes from the heart. And because it comes from the heart, it is something that every single person can do. Because it comes from the heart, then other people can't set up rules to determine who can and who cannot worship. This model of grace says that God is available to everybody, that no one person or one group of people have a monopoly on God's grace. It's available to all.

"We never take God anywhere; we find God already present." – Bishop Ken Carder

Back to Purpose

The grace model that we have affects our motivation and purpose for going on a VIM experience. With a limited grace model, we may think we have God's grace and we need to take it to those who do not have it. With an extravagant grace model, we know that we are not taking God anywhere. God is already there. We are simply going to witness to where God's grace is already at work.

Acts 11: 19-26

What did Barnabas find when he came to Antioch?

What do you expect to find or experience on this mission trip?

"Grace has no bounds." – Alan Storey

Grace and the Homeless

To illustrate the boundless nature of God's grace, I want to share a personal story. When I was in college I went through a crisis of faith. I didn't know what I believed. I quit going to church. Finally, I ended up one Sunday at a congregation in downtown Birmingham called Church of the Reconciler. This is a very unique church as about ½ the members are homeless men and women. I went, almost as a desperate attempt to hold on to what little faith I had left. After the service, a homeless man came up and introduced himself to me and said, "I'm glad you're here." I said, "Thanks, this is a great place. I think I'll come and volunteer here." Even though I was impoverished in faith, I still felt like I was the one who was supposed to be helping; I felt that I was the one who was supposed to bring grace to this homeless man. I was acting as if I were the gatekeeper to grace. I was going to come and volunteer. The man said to me, "Volunteer? I don't want you to volunteer to help me. I want you to worship with me." So I did. And over time, I listened as homeless people shared with me their struggles with poverty and violence and drugs. But I also listened as many of them shared with me their amazing faith in God, and, as I listened, I began to regain my faith. I began to see that I didn't need to bring God's grace to them because God's grace was already there in a real and powerful way. And as I witnessed God's grace in the lives of homeless men and women, I began to see how God's grace was at work in my life.

Jesus as Missionary

Phillipians 2:5-8

Jesus was a missionary. He was **sent** from God to come and share love with the world.

According to the passage we just read, what are the attributes of Jesus' missionary work?

What can we learn about the way that Jesus became one with the people with whom he was sent to serve?

Luke 5:17-26

When Jesus sees the paralytic, the first thing he does is say, “Your sins are forgiven.” What had this person done to receive forgiveness of sins? Nothing. He was simply lowered through the roof in the room where Jesus was, and Jesus offered him words of grace. Jesus had never met this person before and yet he knew that God’s grace was already present in his life. Jesus always took an extravagant view of grace. God’s love and grace is present in the life of every single person in every single place.

What does this passage teach us about the magnitude of Jesus’ love?

How can we be missionaries like Jesus in this experience?

“Jesus loved loving more than anything else in the world.” – Alan Storey

Suggested Journal topics:

- 1) How have you experienced grace in your life?
- 2) Is your purpose for going on this trip motivated by a limited or an extravagant model of grace?
- 3) How can you be a witness to God’s boundless grace on this mission experience?
- 4) How might you be a recipient of God’s boundless grace on this mission experience?

TAKING THE GOSPEL VS. TAKING OUR GOSPEL – Session 3

We never live out our faith in a vacuum, but rather we strive to be Christians while also living in a particular time and place with a particular culture. Often times, our faith is so immersed in our culture that it is difficult to separate what is necessary for our faith and what is added on by our culture. There's nothing wrong with our culture influencing the ways we worship God. In fact, it is impossible to completely avoid this. It becomes a problem, however, when we believe that people have to accept our culture if they are to accept the gospel. Or, in other words, it becomes a problem when we begin to believe that our culture and the gospel are the same things.

What are some of the elements in our church that reflect our culture?

Do we live as if some of these cultural elements are essential to the gospel?

The early Christians had the same problem. The first great debate in the early church was whether or not Gentiles could become Christians without accepting Jewish culture. Some said that Gentiles must be circumcised, that is they must take on the mark of being a Jew. But Paul came along and said, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. The only thing that counts is faith working through love."⁷ Faith and love are universal. Every culture in the world places a value on faith and love. Circumcision was a particular cultural practice of the Jewish people. Paul is saying that the gospel of Christ transcends culture.



This picture shows that the Jewish emphasis on circumcision prevented some Gentiles from joining the church.⁸ We always run the risk of alienating people if we assume that our way of living out the gospel is the only way.

*What do we know about the culture where we are going?
(This would be a good place to teach participants about the culture)*

What in our culture might be offensive to those we are going to serve?

⁷ Galatians 5:6

⁸ The picture comes from Daniel Erlander's *Manna and Mercy*.

CULTURE AS A MEANS TO WORSHIP

Our particular cultural practices do not have to be something negative. Many elements that are unique to a particular culture can provide meaningful ways to draw us closer to God. Paul never said Jews should quit being circumcised. He recognized that the Jewish practice of circumcision was a way for Jews to enter into meaningful covenant with God. Paul did not have a problem with the practice of circumcision. Rather, Paul had a problem with people saying that circumcision is the only way to God.

What elements from your own culture bring you closer to God?

Can you imagine how these cultural elements might appear to Christians from other cultures?

The Gospel and Native American Culture

Just as elements from our culture enhance our worship of God, elements that are unique to other cultures (that might even seem unchristian to us) can enhance worship as well. Read the following excerpt from Brian McClaren's *A New Kind of Christian*:

The character in his book, Pastor Dan Poole, was talking with a group of Native American ministers. Dan asked them, "Do any of you use Native American culture in your church services back home?" Each one denied doing so until one finally said:

"I am Hopi, and one of the most meaningful memories in my life is being a boy, before our family became Christians, and being at the pow-wow. We would dance and dance for hours each day. You see, in Hopi culture, dance isn't just symbolic. Dance is actually a form of prayer. Every time my foot stamps on the ground, I'm saying something to the Great Spirit that I could never put into words. My whole body is praying as I move around the circle.'

"By this time, he was standing and demonstrating the movements. Then he sat down again and put his head in his hands. 'One of my greatest dreams,' he said, 'would be someday to lead my congregation in a Hopi dance of worship to my Savior.'"⁹

Many Western Christians have assumed that rituals from other cultures contradict the gospel of Christ, but what does this story teach us?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: THE STORY OF PENTECOST¹⁰

Read Acts 2:1-13

Is this a miracle of the tongue or a miracle of the ear?

For centuries, we've interpreted Pentecost as a miracle of the tongue: the disciples are given tongues of fire to proclaim the Good News of the gospel. But, if we take the Scripture seriously, then we see that the miracle of the tongue is only half the story. The Scripture says, "Each one **HEARD** them speaking in the native language of each" (Acts 2: 6 emphasis mine). Maybe if we look at this passage as both a miracle of the tongue **AND** a miracle of the ear, we might gain a more complete understanding of this passage.

The disciples are locked up in a room. Their leader had been crucified and they are afraid they could be next. The "devout Jews from every nation" are free to wander about throughout Jerusalem – they do not have to hide

⁹ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 76-77.

¹⁰ This interpretation of Pentecost comes from Eric Law's book, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*.

behind locked doors. Now in this context, who seems to have the most power? It's the crowd. They're free. The disciples, before the coming of the Holy Spirit, are powerless, they are afraid, they are hiding behind locked doors. So maybe the miracle of Pentecost is that the powerless are given tongues to speak and the powerful are given ears to hear.

How might the Church be different today if we understood the story of Pentecost to be a miracle of the ear, of the powerful being given ears to hear?

YOUR CONTEXT

What are the power dynamics between you and those you are going to serve?

You live in the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. You have the resources to travel on this mission experience. If you get hurt or injured or sick, no matter where you are, you will have insurance that will take care of you.

By and large, you have more power than the people you will meet. According to the story of Pentecost, what is the first thing you should do?

How does this understanding of Pentecost change our understanding of what it means to be in mission?

For years, the traditional understanding of missions has been for those in positions of power to go and tell what they know to those who are powerless. This is the same kind of missionary work that we discussed at the beginning when we looked at Rwanda. Those who were conquering native peoples believed they were better, believed their culture was better, and believed their religion was better. So in Rwanda, they tried to make the Tutsis accept European Christian culture. When the powerful come, not to listen, but to assert control, terrible consequences are the result. The gospel, on the other hand, is about giving the powerless a voice. Jesus was not from Rome, the center of political power, or from Jerusalem, the center of religious power. Rather, Jesus was a poor peasant from Nazareth. The story of Pentecost teaches us that the gospel is best proclaimed not by those in power but by the powerless finding a voice.

In our first session, we looked at how God has sent us to love and to form relationships. If we come in a position of power, we can't form relationships. Power is about control and authority. Relationships are about love. Today, we have examined some of our cultural and power differences. Relationships between people of different cultures do not just happen; they require work, and, for those of us in positions of power, the first step is to surrender our power and **LISTEN**.

“What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life.” – Henri Nouwen

Suggested Journal Topics

- 1) What are the challenges about seeing listening as my first responsibility on this mission experience?
- 2) What cultural baggage am I bringing with me? What do I not understand about the culture to which I am going?
- 3) What part of my culture have I mistakenly believed is essential to the gospel?

ENCOUNTERING JESUS – Session 4

In our first session, we looked at how we are sent to witness, serve, and love on this mission experience. We are also sent to receive.

The Gift of the Poor – Back to Matthew 25

Read Mt 25: 31-46

Why does Jesus associate himself with “the least of these?”

We looked at this passage several weeks ago to talk about the kind of service God asks of us. The most striking part of this passage is that Jesus tells us that, “Whatever we do for the least of these, we do for him.” In other words, Jesus is telling us that if we want to find him, we have to go to the hungry and thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisons because that’s where he hangs out. In a sense, then, when we go to the poor, we receive far more than we give. We might help build a house for them or provide medical supplies or serve food. But they give us Jesus. In preparing to go on this mission experience, expect nothing less than an encounter with Jesus.

On this trip what are some ways you may encounter/meet/experience the living Jesus?

How might this understanding of Matthew 25 affect your purpose and motivation for participating in mission work?

The Gift of Hospitality

When we go on a mission experience, we must not forget that we are guests who are invited to enter into the lives of others. Often, we feel guilty to accept the hospitality offered to us by those less fortunate financially than we are. When I was a seminary student, I spent some time in South Africa and stayed several weekends with families living in informal settlements, or what we would call “shanty towns.” Each time I stayed with a family in the informal settlement, they made sure that I received the biggest portion of food, that I received the bed (the family would sleep on the floor), and that I received the only chair. At first, I felt terrible about this arrangement. I felt I was depriving people who were in drastic need. Shouldn’t I be the one giving to them? But as we spent time together, I began to see the incredible joy these families took in offering hospitality to me. I begin to realize that my discomfort had more to do with my concern for myself than for the families. In our society, I normally have more power than people in informal settlements. I have the power to give or not to give. And yet, in this instance, the power structure was flipped on its head. Being able to offer hospitality inverts the normal structures of power. I was dependent on people in shanty towns instead of them being dependent on me. My hostess had the power to give her bed, her food, and her chair to me. If I refused her offer of hospitality, I would have robbed her of her power and reclaimed it for myself.

The kingdom Jesus proclaimed was in many ways an Upside Down Kingdom.¹¹ The gospel is filled with examples of Jesus making the last, first by inverting the normal power structures. After the resurrection, Jesus first appeared to women, thus inverting the sexist power structure of his day. When calling his disciples, instead of choosing the best educated, Jesus chose fishermen. By learning to receive hospitality on this mission experience, we can learn to give up our power and to accept Jesus’ way of inverting power structures. And perhaps that is the gift the poor offers us. Because the poor are powerless, they know what it means to depend on God. And by offering hospitality, they claim power for themselves and put us in a position of dependence. And when we recognize our dependence on the poor, then we are in place where we can meet Jesus. We realize that we are completely dependent in the arms of a loving God. And it is in that place of dependence where we can find Jesus and his Upside-Down Kingdom.

¹¹ For more on this concept, see Donald Kraybill’s *The Upside-Down Kingdom*.

“Many who are first will be last and the last will be first” – Mark 10: 31

What do you need to give up in your life to encounter Jesus?

How can you prepare yourself spiritually to live the reality of this Upside down Kingdom?

How might this mission experience help you learn to give up some of your power?

Michelle’s story

A friend of mine, who also spent time in South Africa, experienced Christ through receiving hospitality from a woman who was very poor. It was a difficult experience for her, but one in which she and a woman named Gertrude experienced the love of Christ through the giving and receiving of hospitality. Here’s her story:

“I have had the opportunity to visit with a woman named Glenda who runs a ministry called Phakamisa. Phakamisa means, “to lift up” in Zulu. Glenda has done such a marvellous job of empowering the older women in the communities to learn how to properly care for the children who have been orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. The women come in for training at the church I work at and there is a whole network of leaders in the communities who report back to Glenda the needs of each community. Glenda took me with her one afternoon to visit with the Gogos (grannies). We met them at a local school where they had planted this beautiful garden. I sat on the ground next to Glenda and listened to each of the Gogos give her report about how her work was going. One Gogo, Gertrude, shared with us that she was raising 6 orphans and that she barely had enough food to feed them. She was 73 years old. As we were preparing to return back to the church, Gertrude met us smiling on the road. Her arms were full of avocados. She gave an avocado to Glenda and one to me. My first reaction was to say, “No, I can’t take this. You have children to feed.” Yet, something in her eyes stopped me. I could tell that this meant so much to her to give me this gift. Yet, it was so very hard for me to receive.

*I have thought a lot about this avocado. It is funny how one little vegetable can stir up so much emotion. What shocked me was that this woman who had so little to feed her and the children she cared for would offer me **food**. If it were something she had made it would have been easier for me to accept. Her gift of the avocado was as extravagant as the woman who poured a whole bottle of perfume on Jesus’ feet. Her extravagance shocked me. It is difficult for me to receive hospitality such as this. I responded in the same way that the disciples responded to the woman. I missed the point just as they did.*

This woman demonstrated a trust in the abundance of God’s grace with her gift of the avocado. I was worried that she would not have enough to feed herself or the children. Yet, she trusted that God would provide for her needs. This is the gift that the poor can offer us. For, I have never once in my life had to wonder where my next meal was going to come from. I don’t know what it is like to rely on God for food. The faith that this Gogo had was so beautiful it still moves me to tears.

It is just as important for me to learn how to receive hospitality as it is for me to give hospitality. For, if I only give, then I am belittling the humanity of the other who is trying to participate in a friendship with me.

So then, in our relationship with the poor, we often enter these relationships with a certain good we want for the other person. Maybe our relationship is based on our desire for them to have a job, to have an education, or even simply for them to have food to eat. Yet, this is not really true friendship. True friendship is more about the desire to know the person than to obtain a certain good for them.

I must admit that I really wanted this woman to have food. I believe that our right to life includes our right to food, should it not? I don't think this is a bad desire, but I understand the danger in imposing my desires for this woman upon our friendship, for then I am not truly becoming her friend. I am creating a relationship based on the power I have to bring about a certain good in her life, rather than understanding the certain good she can bring into my life just by my knowing her.

I am quite sure I will never look at an avocado again without seeing the face of my friend Gertrude. I hope to visit with her again. Yet, if I never set eyes on Gertrude again, just knowing her for one day has changed me. So often the Greatest Commandment is categorized as a "thing we must do". Yet, I believe that this type of love, to love another as ourselves, is like a present to us all. For as we accept the fact that each of us is a child of God created in God's likeness, we can catch a glimpse of God hidden in the faces of each other. This is indeed a gift and a blessing! Yet, so often we live our lives never opening these gifts God has placed before us. What if I had turned away my avocado? What if?"

A word of caution: there is a fine line between receiving hospitality and going to be served. The point is not that we go to be served, but that, in our service, we also receive the hospitality of the people. Jesus said, "The Son of man did not come to be served" (Matthew 20:28). But he also spent large amounts of his time receiving hospitality. He ate in the homes of Pharisees and tax collectors. A poor woman anointed his feet with costly perfume. Jesus came to serve, but part of his service was not only to give but to receive hospitality.

What is the difference in going to be served and in serving while also receiving hospitality?

In your day to day life, how do you respond to receiving gifts? Is this a comfortable or awkward experience for you?

How do you feel when you extend hospitality to others?

In this mission encounter how will you respond to the hospitality offered to you?

SENT TO BE TRANSFORMED

Read Acts 10:1-35

How was Peter changed because of his mission work with Cornelius?

Peter was a missionary. Cornelius invited him to come to his home and share the gospel with them. But in this experience, Peter was changed more than Cornelius. And this was no small change. God used this encounter with Cornelius to challenge Peter's very understanding of who God is. For Peter, to follow God meant that he must avoid things that would cause him to be unclean. There were certain foods he couldn't eat, there were certain people he couldn't touch, and there were certain homes he couldn't enter. Peter's religion, his view of God, forbade him from entering Cornelius' home. But God had other plans. God longed for Peter's transformation and God wanted to remove everything in Peter's life, even his religion, that was an obstacle to that formation. Peter had to learn that God is more concerned with relationships than with religion.

Sometimes we can be like Peter. Sometimes some of our deepest and most sincere religious beliefs can blind us to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Jesus summed up Christianity by saying that we are to love God and to love people. Starting with this foundation, perhaps we should be willing to risk being transformed in every other aspect of our faith. The Holy Spirit has a history of transforming those who are sent to do mission work. So as you leave for this VIM experience, be open to the Spirit's leading. Change is not always easy. You may find that some of your deepest beliefs that you have held for years might come into

question. You might even find that, like Peter, even your religion is called into question. Do not resist the struggle. It was not easy for Peter. But through the struggle, Peter came to a more authentic understanding of who God is and of God's purpose for his life. If you are open to being challenged through this VIM experience, then trust that through the struggle, you too will gain a more authentic understanding of God and God's purpose for your life.

Peace be with you as you serve.

Journal Topics

- 1) In what areas of your life do you hope to be transformed by this VIM experience?
- 2) How have your motivations for participating in mission work changed after preparing for this experience?
- 3) Is there an aspect of your religion that hinders authentic relationships? If so, how might God be challenging your religion?

PART II ON THE JOURNEY

This section offers possibilities for reflection and prayer to help process each day's experiences during the VIM trip. Because all trips are different, it will be up to you to determine which of these questions and prayers would be most meaningful for reflection as you process your experience. Mission work can be very draining physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is often tempting to forego the reflection time and head straight to bed at the end of each day. I strongly encourage you to resist this temptation. Leaving time to reflect, to journal, and to support one another in prayer not only encourages and strengthens you for the work but also helps to foster a lasting spiritual impact on you and on those on your team.

During a mission experience, there may be some days when people have far more negative reflections than positive ones. During encounters of pain and suffering, sometimes it is difficult to see signs of hope, which is another reason why processing the experience together and supporting one another in prayer is so crucial. The message of the gospel is that in the most hopeless of situations, on a Roman cross, Jesus brought hope and life to the whole world. Reflect and process the pain, but always be aware of the signs of hope and the places where God is at work.

Sample Reflection Questions: It may be helpful to give people time to journal about these questions individually before sharing with the whole group.

- Where did you see God's grace already at work in this community today?
- Where did you encounter Jesus today?
- How were you Jesus to others today?
- When did you experience failure and when were you discouraged?
- How were death and suffering present today?
- How were life and joy present?
- What signs of hope did you see today?
- What would Jesus have done today?
- How does it feel to not have an answer to all the questions?
- What kinds of poverty did you see today?
- What did you learn from the people we met today?
- What did you not understand today?
- What can these two communities do together as a result of our time together?
- How will this encounter change the way you live when you return home?
- What has this experience meant to you?
- What Scriptures speak to your experience today?
- What challenged you today?
- What did you struggle with today?
- In what ways has your faith been challenged?
- What is something new you learned today? (skills, culture, etc)
- What shocked you (culture, religion, lifestyle, etc.) today?

Prayer and Encouragement

Often times, mission experiences can be very emotionally draining. For some of you, this mission experience may be your most profound encounter with human pain and suffering. It is important for the group to offer support and care for one another. Many of the above questions allow people to share their feelings over the day.

Another way to do this would be to invite people to share prayer concerns and then to pray for one another.

Here is a suggested way of sharing

SHARE CELEBRATIONS: What were the encounters of the day where you experienced life and joy, where you saw Jesus and his grace manifested in your life, in your group, and among the people?

SHARE CONCERNS: Where did you encounter pain and suffering today? Who would you like the group to remember in prayer? How do you need support in your own life through what you are encountering?

SHARE COMMITMENT: What is God calling you to do or to change in your own life through what you experienced today?

There are many meaningful ways to enter into prayer together after each person has had the opportunity to share. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Partner Prayer: Find a partner and take turns praying for the other person and for the things he or she has shared.
2. Communal prayer: Provide a prayerful liturgy (like Prayers of the People) for the group to pray together. The liturgy should reflect the experiences of the day.
3. Journal: Invite the group to spend time alone and write their prayer in their journal. This provides more time for personal reflection and introspection.
4. Circle prayer: The leader begins by praying for the person to her right by placing her hands on his shoulders. The prayer should not be long and it may be spoken or unspoken. The personal touch is important. When finished, the leader goes on to the next person until she has prayed for everyone. After each person is prayed for, he or she stands up and prays for each member of the group just as the leader did. In the end, each person will have prayed for every other person.
5. Musical prayer: Many find musical chants to be meaningful ways of praying. One person would develop a simple tune and simple words to express a prayer. For example, "Lord, bless the poor. Lord, bless the poor..." After repeated several times, the prayer could change (with the same tune) to another prayer concern (i.e. "Lord, teach us love..."). The Taize community is a great example for this sort of prayerful meditation.¹²

¹² For more information, see http://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique12.html

PART III
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” – Phillipians 1:6

You have been given a tremendous gift. You have been given the opportunity to experience life with your sisters and brothers in a different place. You have had the privilege of serving them and of receiving from them. Often times, it is difficult to come home. Many people who have participated in mission experiences struggle to find ways for their mission work to affect the way they live at home. This part of the booklet seeks to help those of you who are struggling with the question, “Where do we go from here?”

From Charity to Justice – Session 1

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” – Micah 6:8

Short-term mission work is, for the most part, about charity. And charity is an important Christian obligation. Mother Theresa spent her whole life offering charity to others. But charity, by itself, is not enough. The Bible teaches us that we are all called to meet the needs of those who are suffering (charity). But the Bible also teaches us that we must address the reasons why people suffer in the first place (justice).

What are the needs of the people where you served?

How did you work to meet those needs?

What do you think are some of the causes of those needs?

How could you begin to address the causes?

What ways can you help others to understand your experience and the needs of those you encountered? (part of the VIM experience is to translate your experience for people back home.)

Do you see similar needs and situations to those you experienced on your trip in your own communities?

Here are some statistics that may help us understand some of the causes of poverty in our country and across the world.¹³ In the U.S., the average pay of a CEO of a Fortune 500 company is 1000 times the pay of someone making minimum wage. The richest 50 people in the world control more wealth than the poorest 416 million. 40% of the world’s population live on \$2/day. This 40% receives 5% of the world’s income whereas the richest 10% receive 54%.

Where are you located within these statistics? How does your answer affect your understanding of the cause and effect relationship between poverty and wealth in the world?

How might the rich in the world (even people like us) contribute to the poverty in the world?

¹³ These statistics come from the 2005 United Nations Millennium Development Report.

God's Gift of Manna

Read Exodus 16:1-20

This story happens shortly after God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. In many ways, the story of Egypt reflects the conditions of the world today. Pharaoh owned all the land (wealth in the hands of a few), people were enslaved and had to work constantly so Pharaoh could get richer (many women and children throughout the world work 12-15 hours a day in sweat shops being paid around 21 cents an hour to make the shoes and clothes we wear).¹⁴ Therefore, when God delivered the people of Israel from slavery, God gave the people the Torah, the law, in part to ensure that Israel would not become that which they left, to ensure that Israel would not become Egypt. The preface of the Ten Commandments says, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery..." In other words, the commandments are deeply connected with God's delivering the people from slavery. They are to ensure that no one will be enslaved among God's people. And one of the ways to make sure that Israel would not become like each was for the people to learn to share. By giving the people of Israel manna, God was not only providing them with food but also teaching them a lesson in sharing. In fact, learning to share was the first thing God taught the people of Israel after delivering them from Egypt.

What happened to the Manna of those who gathered more than they needed?

What does this story teach us about poverty, wealth, and excess?

What is the manna in your life?...in your community?

Maybe a first step in moving from charity to justice is to learn that hoarding stinks, that when we take more than we need, others do not have enough. And when others do not have enough, when others suffer in poverty, our hoarding becomes a stench in the nostrils of God.

God's Justice vs. Our Justice

The lesson of Manna demonstrates a Biblical model of justice, and often times, a Biblical understanding of justice is different than the pervasive notion of justice in our society. We tend to think about justice in terms of the criminal justice system, about bringing the guilty party to justice. This kind of justice is usually about punishment. David, a homeless man that I know in downtown Birmingham, knows about this kind of justice. Here is his story:

David was working at a waffle house and living in his car. He had finally been able to get a job and was hoping to save enough money to be able to get off the streets. He soon ran into a problem when a police officer noticed that David had an expired tag on his car. The officer did his job, ran a background check on David, found that he had an unpaid traffic fine, and arrested him. At his court date, he was given an additional fine with a deadline. But since he missed work the night that he spent in jail, he was fired. Consequently, David had a larger fine and no way to pay the original fine since he had lost his job. As time went on, David was not able to get enough money to pay this fine, so he was given an additional fine. David became trapped in a justice system that hindered rather than helped his recovery from homelessness.

The Biblical model of justice is drastically different. In the Bible, justice is not about punishing perpetrators, but about restoring that which is broken.

Read Isaiah 58: 6-7

What is the connection between loosing the bond of injustice and feeding the hungry?

¹⁴ For more information on sweatshops, go to www.sweatshopwatch.org

Where did you see injustice on your VIM experience?

How can you work to bring a Biblical form of justice to that situation? What about at home as well?

“True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Journal Topics

1. What are some areas of my life where I hoard? How can I apply God’s lesson of Manna to these areas?
2. What are some ways I can share my resources with those in need?
3. What are some of the injustices of the world against which I feel God is calling me to work?
4. How can I incorporate a Biblical view of justice into my life?

LIVING A MISSIONARY LIFESTYLE – Session 2

For most of you, this VIM experience was a time of intense service. You were missionaries for a short period of time. You formed relationships with people who may be different from you. You witnessed to God's love and you served others. You may have had a deep personal encounter with Jesus and have felt that your life has somehow been changed. And now, you are back home.

What was that first Monday like when you had to get up and go back into work? Or the first day that you had to get your kids ready for school? Or even the first church meeting that you had to go to where people argued about things that may no longer seem so important to you?

The challenge, now, is to avoid allowing this VIM experience to become a one or two week experience that has no affect on your everyday routine. How can you foster a missionary lifestyle?

What experiences on your VIM trip were the most transformative for you?

What frustrations have you experienced as a result of your transformation since you have returned home?

Back to the Great Commission

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.” – Acts 1:8

Where does Jesus tell the disciples to begin their work?

Through this VIM experience, you have been able to be Christ's witnesses in another place. We are commanded to do this. But Jesus first commands the disciples to witness in Jerusalem, to witness at home. Too often churches make a habit of serving Christ in the ends of the Earth, while ignoring service opportunities at home. I hope that this VIM experience will encourage each of you to live as missionaries in your hometown and to find ways to serve there.

Why is it sometimes easier to go somewhere else to serve people in need than to serve people at home?

What are the needs of your community? Where are the places of pain and suffering?

How can you be Christ's witness in Jerusalem (in your home town)?

If we take Jesus' words seriously, then we realize that he expects us to live a missionary lifestyle all the time. Through the VIM experience, you have been able to serve others and give of yourself, but you have also received an incredible gift. You have been received by your sisters and brothers in another place. You have experienced life with them and encountered Jesus among them. You may have experienced the beauty of another culture and the scenery of another place. And Jesus tells us that he has expectations for us when we receive such wonderful gifts.

“To whom much has been given, much will be required.” – Luke 12:48

Peter also received a gift.

Read John 22:15-19

Peter was able to spend three years walking around with Jesus, listening to him teach, witnessing the miracles he performed. Peter was able to experience forgiveness when he failed by denying Jesus three times. And here, at the end of John's gospel, Peter's encounter with Jesus is about to change. His time for walking around Galilee with Jesus is over. Jesus is leaving, but before he goes, he gives Peter a job to do. Jesus expects Peter to no longer be the same after experiencing life with him. He expects Peter's daily life to be a response to his encounter with Jesus. And that's the same challenge for you.

What gifts did you receive from this VIM experience?

How can you live your life in response to these gifts?

How can you "feed Jesus' sheep" where you live?

Work as a Holy Calling

Read Ephesians 4:28

Why does Paul tell thieves they must stop stealing and work honestly?

For Paul, the purpose of work is to have something to share with the needy. In this way, all work is a holy calling. We, in the church, have a tendency to think that only pastors, or foreign missionaries, or the like are the ones whose job is a holy calling. For others, their job is simply a way to pay the bills and put food on the table. The Bible does not share that view. All work is a holy calling and so we must ask how we can use our job to serve God's purposes. How can we use our work to live a missionary lifestyle?

For some, you may feel God calling you to find another job. Peter and the disciples left full time work as fishermen to be apostles. But this is not necessarily the case for everyone.

Read Luke 19:1-9

How was Zacchaeus' job affected by his encounter with Jesus?

After Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus, he was still a tax collector, but a different kind of tax collector. Instead of using his job to exploit the poor, he used his job to serve the poor.

How can you use your work to serve God?

How can you use your work to serve others?

"Your vocation in life is where your deep joy and the world's deep pain meet." – Frederick Buechner

Journal Topic

1. What do you feel God is calling you to do or to change in your life as a result of this VIM experience?

CONCLUSION

This is the end of this booklet, but it should not be the end of your reflection and processing of your VIM experience. Rather, perhaps this VIM experience could be the beginning of living a reflective life, not only on this mission trip, but on how you can live as a missionary where you are. If you have been faithful to this study, then you have fostered the spiritual disciplines of study, reflection, and journaling. I encourage you to continue practicing these disciplines.

For some of you, this experience and this study may have produced more questions than answers. That can be a frustrating thing, but it is not a bad thing. I encourage you to continue to ask the hard questions, to continue to struggle to find the answers, and to not give up if some of the answers do not come. One of the paradoxes of our faith is that the more we encounter Jesus, the more we realize how little we truly understand, the more we realize the truth of Paul's statement that we only see dimly (1 Corinthians 13: 12).

But through this experience, I hope you have seen that you are not alone. There are children of God all over the world wrestling with the same questions, the same struggles. There are people who have experienced the very depths of human pain and yet have an inexplicable joy that even they do not understand. And somehow, there is great hope in that. There is great hope that all of us can experience that joy in the midst of our pain and struggle, in the midst of our lack of understanding. So continue to struggle and wrestle. Continue to seek out ways to experience life with your sisters and brothers in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the Earth. Continue to ask the hard questions. For perhaps it is in embracing the struggle that we truly find what Jesus termed, "the abundant life."

Blessings on your journey!