

Short-Term Mission Trips

By Bill Moberly

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Post Pandemic: Short-Term Mission Trips Are Still Worth it!

Among other things, January is the time for me to wrap up the final phase of recruitment for summer short-term mission trips (STM's). For many years my wife and I raised up teams to serve across the former Soviet Union while I served as Director of what was then East European Missions Network (EEMN).



2008 EEMN Russia team



our Cambodia and Vietnam – global view

Now I focus on teams to serve in Vietnam and in Cambodia with our ALWM International ministry. This summer we can use about a dozen people, while in my EEMN days we routinely had 80-100 people every summer. Our emphasis is intentional, as we have seen the real impact on people's lives over the years, both in those we served and in the short-term missionaries from partner churches who traveled with us!



2019 ALWM Cambodia team

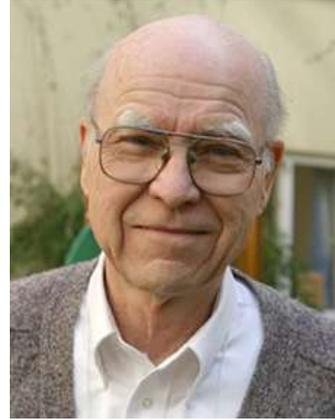


2019 ALWM Vietnam team

What Are Short-Term Mission Trips?

The modern era of short-term missions began in the 1960s. Ralph Winter, founder of the U.S. Center for World Missions, has called short-term missions the “least anticipated major mutation in modern missions.”*

Since that time, when an estimated 500+ people served on teams in 1965, pre-pandemic numbers were estimated at 1.5 million people annually! Recurring surveys of current global missionaries say that 90% or more heard their call to the nations after a short-term mission trip. That was true in my life as well.



Ralph Winter

It’s not just for full-time workers, although those are still needed. When it comes to personalizing the Great Commission for followers of Christ and for churches, few things will do more to help make a real connection with global missions than an STM. By definition, an STM is just that—a brief cross-cultural outreach that lasts from one to three weeks.

What adjectives can you use to describe a short-term mission trip?

- Life-changing? Yes!
- Unforgettable? Yes!
- Challenging? Yes!
- Hard work? Yes!
- Worthwhile? Yes!
- Popular? Yes!
- Misunderstood? Sometimes!
- Vacation? NO!!

Well, seven out of eight isn’t bad.

* Roger Peterson, “What’s Happening in Short Term Missions.”
<http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives/265/03 -2006?pg=2>.

Done Well, Short-Term Mission Trips Chang Lives!

I was in Croatia in 1991 when I met the leader of Teen Challenge in Europe. He heard the Gospel for the first time and came to faith as a result of the work of a short-term team from Norway that sang and preached on a street corner!

A dear friend of ours in Slovakia began her journey to faith and full-time ministry when a short-term missionary came to her public school English class in post-Soviet Slovakia and made mention of the Bible as his “manual for life” (which was all he could say in that context) in response to a question about why he had come to their country. By God’s grace, that little phrase penetrated the hearts of four teenage girls and sent them on a search into God’s Word that led all four to faith in Christ. Most likely the speaker didn’t even remember saying it, and the girls never saw him again.

Prayer, Planning, and Preparation

The common refrain from critics and proponents alike is that the keys to doing them well are in PRAYER, PLANNING and PREPARATION. In my context with ALWM, previously with EEMN, and even back in my early days with AIMS traveling to Russia in 1992-1994, those have been at the core of what we do and where we go. There can be great benefit for the mission field in even a few short weeks. That’s because a quality STM team is actually part of a larger picture: the ongoing ministry of national leaders and/or missionaries.

In practical terms, this means:

- We only go where we are invited to bring a team.
- We coordinate our team goals and activities with the specific requests and input of indigenous leaders and missionaries.
- We only go where we know our local co-workers intend to follow up. Since we plan together from the beginning, we are already intentionally doing things that help their ongoing ministry.
- We train the team beforehand and once in country, then continue to train and debrief daily.

A fruitful STM is not easy to plan for a church: it's just not in the 'wheel house' of most pastors and lay leaders. Moreover, the financial undertaking for one church to find a critical mass of people to serve is daunting. If you or your church currently support the work of an indigenous worker or global worker through an agency, contact them to see what they suggest! Investing time, energy and resources into visiting work you already value leverages the synergy between the long-term partnership with workers and agencies and the impact of STM.



2017 Hong Kong English Bible Camp



2017 Hong Kong team members

What About You?

For those still actively raising a family, an STM is doable, worth it, and takes planning and coordination. Occasionally a small family goes together, sometimes mom or dad will take part with a teenager, while the other stays home. Are you retired or an 'empty nester'? Many of our team members over the years have come from this age group! What about you? Why not?

I remember one conversation at my home church in New Mexico some years ago after I spoke and invited people to take a step of faith and join us.

One woman asked, "Are your English Bible Camp teams always in June?"

I said, "Yes, mostly June and July when children and youth are out of school."

She replied, "Oh, well if they ever move to another time let me know. Our summer symphony concert series is always in June and July."

My only reply was, "OK", as in my mind I said, "Really?"

OK, I do want the Lord to genuinely call people, so we have never twisted arms or coerced people to go on an STM. Yet, serving the Lord and making a difference for the Kingdom - particularly when you travel half a world away to countries where the need is great, the opportunity is real, and few are believers in Christ - will always involve some sacrifice, inconvenience, and perhaps even missing a concert for one summer out of lifetime!

Celebrating Global Mission involves fresh perspective about how and where the Lord is at work around the world. There is no better way for this to happen than serving on a quality STM. In more than 30 years of leading teams, I have never had anyone on our teams regret their decision to GO!

In addition to ALWM teams, the websites of the NALC and LCMC give links to short term mission opportunities and organizations. If you need additional assistance, write me directly at missionshelp@alwm.org.

In Christ for the nations,

Bill Moberly, CGM Editor