

North Park GO Bulletinⁱ

Mission Trips

Version 1.0

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Purpose:

Mission trips are a significant aspect of the modern day mission experience. Often identified simply as “Short Term Missions”, they involve travel on the part of church members to a local or global setting where relationship building and/or work is performed. This GO Bulletin was produced out of a desire to provide North Park’s people with insight and policy related to Mission Trips.

1. Background

Current [statistics](#) indicate that between two and three million people travel on mission trips annually from North America. Assuming a conservative cost of \$1,000 per trip, the expenses involved in such trips would be two to three billion dollars per year.

In 2002, a partnership of agencies and churches created the [Standards of Excellence in Short Term Missions](#). The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada began to speak into the conversation in 2000 and then in 2009 updated its own document, the [Code of Best Practice in Short Term Mission](#).

It was in 2006 that North Park noticed emerging research questioning the overall impact of short term mission trips on the person who travels. [Kurt Ver Beek](#), Professor of Sociology at Calvin College, completed extensive research on individuals from North America who had travelled on short term mission trips. The sobering conclusion was such trips only minimally impacted those who travel. David Livermore’s work on short term missions emerged at the same time, calling the Church into greater cross cultural insight and partnership and away from “parachuting” into foreign countries with questionable impact. Livermore’s book, [Serving with Eyes Wide Open](#), exposed critical components required to strengthen the short term mission movement. As such, it was in 2006 that North Park began to question impact relative to the dollars spent on mission trips.

Corbett and Fikkert’s groundbreaking book [When Helping Hurts](#) was published in 2009, asking the Church to think differently about how we enter the community of the poor and to consider the potential negative effects. Bob Lupton’s book [Toxic Charity](#) elevated the conversation to a place where charity itself was subject to scrutiny.

The combination of limited impact on the traveler and concerns over potential negative impact on those who receive travelers caused the North Park Global Outreach Team to rethink the general trend towards Churches sending young people and adults on short term mission trips. Considering others more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3,4) became a guiding principle in our search to understand how we should engage the world. Honoring our global brothers and sisters as true equals in the kingdom, and seeking a way towards reciprocity and mutual benefit emerged as both important and new ideas.

A particularly painful discovery for us involved the question of why North Park had few Child Protection expectations for those travelling to work with vulnerable children in undeveloped settings and yet in our Church, the Child Protection Policy played such a significant role in deploying volunteers.

It was in 2005, that we realized that in that particular summer we had sent a highly vulnerable homeless individual on a mission trip to work with vulnerable children in the Dominican Republic. It is difficult to even suggest that our intentions were good in the situation, as it highlights how we completely failed to consider the needs of both the person that we sent and the children in the Dominican Republic. Adding to this an understanding about things such as potential Attachment Disorder concerns prompted us to scrutinize our global relationship building more intensively.

In 2007 North Park had a budget of \$24,000 per year for “Short Term Missions”. We had a Short Term Team in place that interviewed individuals from the congregation and then allocated funding to them for their trips. We celebrated most things that people did regardless of organization, length, or purpose of the trip. We did little to evaluate the impact of these trips on the traveler or those who were supposed to have been impacted by the trip.

2. Mission Trips and Minors

Troublesome questions emerged when considering the purpose and potential impact of sending individuals younger than eighteen (minors).

Our conclusion was that if we respect our global brothers and sisters, then our first priority has to be sending people with true added value. Sending teams of minors into settings where people are vulnerable seemed so incongruent with the honor and dignity due them. While face painting may bring a moment of joy to a child in an undernourished setting, it avoids the harsh and more important reality of the desperate need for such things as agriculture and food sustainability.

An aspect of our journey included a growing concern of our insurance providers over the potential risks when minors travel into the often more rugged settings of the underdeveloped world.

We were fortunate at North Park to have a unique relationship with [Sanctuary Toronto](#), where our young people travel annually to spend a week in relationship with the homeless in Canada’s biggest city. Sanctuary’s wisdom in teaching our young people how to understand the roots and challenges of poverty, along with their emphasis on the dignity of the homeless, has touched the lives of many of our young people. A number of High School students have travelled multiple times as the experience has been so transforming. We have witnessed local engagement having the potential to be not only transformative, but also a responsible act on our part given its cost effectiveness. What we are observing is that those who have emerged from multiple trips to Sanctuary show the greatest promise for the cross cultural challenges in our global work.

What are the key aspects of our thinking on Mission Trips and Minors?

- North Park has established a policy of not authorizing, funding or encouraging minors on mission trips outside of Canada. Travelling with family is encouraged and authorized, but not funded.
- Building vision for neighbors, friends and local community leads us to take our young people with us and to teach them how to respect, honor and bring dignity to the work of mission.

Seeking local partners where our young people can begin the journey of understanding how to live out Phil 2: 3, 4 is our priority.

- Minors who engage locally are required to participate sacrificially. We refrain from using the words “mission trip” as the emphasis is on partnership and relationship vs the trip itself.
- Talking about our partners in ways that honor them and bring dignity to their community is an important best practice for all that we do with minors.
- Acting responsibly on behalf of those who are vulnerable or in spiritual need in Canada is the training ground and requirement for all global engagement.

3. Partnership Trips

As North Park began to question the purpose and place of mission trips, we were increasing our commitment to particular people groups and causes, as well as developing global partnerships.

North Park began to host *Partnership Trips* where key leaders and advocates travelled regularly to visit our partners. Over time, it became apparent that we needed to establish specific goals for each *Partnership Trip*, with a commensurate trip report outlining lessons learned as well as the impact of the goals. The use of goal setting has served to focus the work of the teams and to create an intentional edge.

Each *Partnership Trip* looks to add skilled individuals who can make a positive difference. An example is adding a Worship Leader to our Annual Prayer Summit in China, or adding a Children’s Program leader to the same event. North Park’s Vulnerability and Exploitation team is a good example of engaging skilled and experienced individuals in “peer support” like ways.

On each *Partnership Trip* we seek to add both a selection of Next Generation (18-30) young adults as well as learners who are considering joining our regular conversations about the partnership.

What are the key aspects of a Partnership Trip?

- We attempt to locate a leader who has the capacity to travel regularly, to think critically about the relationship, and to learn to cross into the culture of the partner.
- Leaders are asked to focus on the partner first and North Park second. Leaders work to build a team of added value members.
- Financing is provided to the core leaders on an as needed basis. Where leaders do not have financial capacity to engage without assistance, the general guideline is to fund the cost of travel annually.
- We work in close conversation with field personnel in establishing a set of measurable goals for each trip. The trip itself is an active expression of mission that brings true added value to the partner. Appendix 1 is an example of a set of goals for a recent Partnership Trip.
- An annual plan establishes the purpose and place of each Partnership Trip.

4. Moving from Short Term to Intern

North Park is moving from *Short Term* to *Intern* as it relates to Next Generation engagement (18-30). This shift came as a result of observing a selection of individuals travelling on Short Term Mission who were doing so for a longer period of time and in the context of a set of skills they were developing that had true “vocation” potential. Observations indicated that individuals travelling in this manner did so with a greater sense of seriousness about their travel, and with a greater impact.

A young adult studying or experienced and proven in Youth Ministry has greater potential to understand and contribute to a global setting where youth ministry is the focus. In the same way a Young Adult studying or experienced in Social Work has greater potential to understand and contribute to a setting where aspects of Social Work are engaged. (A recent example is a young woman who has a Master’s Degree in Social Work serving as an intern with International Justice Mission in India in Aftercare work). While it is true that the 20’s are a season of discovery, we believe that being “proven” in some aspect of life, either by education or work experience, is the right preparation for global service. We prove people locally before engaging them globally.

The scripture has much to say about how God uses our gifts as the central way in which He touches the world. Working with our young adults to ensure that their gifts are considered in mission trips affords the best opportunity for mutual benefit.

What are the key aspects of our focus on Global Internship?

- A Global Intern Team (GIT) is in place with the vision “to call the next generation into global engagement and to equip them for a lifetime of global effectiveness”.
- The GIT seeks to recruit and inspire young adults who are engaged on a vocational journey that includes either education or practical experience. The GIT works to locate and place them in internships with reputable and effective Christian agencies and in the context of their developing vocational pathway. Internships can be six weeks to 2 years in duration.
- The vast majority of Global Internships will be hosted by a Registered Charitable Agency in Canada. In some cases, a Global Internship may be hosted in London and through North Park itself, and in a rare few cases, individuals will be deployed globally under North Park’s charitable coverage in an NPSS (see below).
- The focus of Global Internships is not to recruit missionaries. We are intentional about this as a season of learning; the goal is to *expand their worldview, explore their calling, and meet a real need.*
- Early in the process, the GIT deploys a mentor to develop and coach potential interns.
- A memorandum of understanding (MOU) is written in conversation with the Global Intern. It includes an emphasis on both responsibilities of the Global Intern as well as North Park.
- Global Interns are provided with 10% of their budget needs. Global Interns and their stories are highlighted for further funding from the congregation.
- Our hope is to deploy a large number of Global Interns with the majority returning to North Park to share the story of their journey and to populate the Church with well-informed global citizens. A number of Global Interns will locate appropriate global roles and continue to serve on behalf of the Global Church, and in a vast array of ways. Some will be inspired and equipped to make a major difference in the world.

5. Moving from Short Term to Influencers

North Park is moving from *Short Term to Influencers* as it relates to adult engagement. The shift came as we began to see the potential for engaging skilled and experienced adults globally. A nurse travelling annually to Vietnam to equip nurses in a hospital has a great potential for impact over time. An electrician who travels regularly to Belize, Central America to teach a course to unemployed job seekers as a holistic evangelistic outreach, is a high leverage engagement that is worthy of North Park's support and attention.

There are many individuals who attend North Park who have the potential to be influential around the world. They have skills, networks and experience that God can use in countless places in the world, some of which are desperately in need of their gifts. As a Church in the resource and skill rich West, we have both a unique opportunity as well as a responsibility to deploy the gifts of North Park on behalf of our brothers and sisters around the world.

What are the key aspects of our focus on Global Influencers?

- Influencers are required to be people with specific added value for a global ministry context.
- Because an emerging best practice is monthly contact with and annual travel to global partners, a commitment to regular engagement through travel and communication is required. This rhythm of regular contact with our partners provides the best opportunity for cross cultural learning and relationship building.
- Where influencers do not have financial capacity to engage without assistance, the general guideline is to fund the cost of travel annually.
- Influencers write goals for each trip as well as provide a report on the trip.

6. North Park Strategic Service (NPSS) Trips

Early in our mission trip experiences, we travelled under the full jurisdiction and charitable administration of Mission agencies. These experiences were rewarding and we are grateful for them; in some instances, we continue to travel with agencies. As we researched the potential benefits for travelling under our own charitable administration, we discovered potential gains and freedoms that allowed us opportunity to increase focus as well as reduce costs.

North Park has established a framework called North Park Strategic Service (NPSS) where we have the capacity to charitably administer partnership, intern and influencer trips.

What are the key aspects of a North Park Strategic Service (NPSS) Trip?

- Goals are required and need to be strategic in nature; with a trip report required at the end.
- Proper insurance as well as administration and record keeping for finances is required.

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Appendix 1
Vision Napajat Partnership Trip
Goals

1. To encourage Toi and Lee and strengthen North Park's relationship with the Napajat Church
2. To develop an understanding of Toi's overall vision for the Shan so that we know how to effectively support her in her Church Planting, AIDS Care, and Preaching/Teaching ministry.
3. To teach English to significant adult relationships in the Napajat Church based on the Head Man's needs.
4. To provide personalized English teaching for Toi to benefit her relationships with other Christian leaders and to increase her impact among a wider audience.
5. To develop relationships with the youth of the Napajat Church, and to enrich their English language skills to help them academically and vocationally.
6. To greet key relationships in North Park's Northern Thailand initiative; SIHA, Andrew and Shona Goodman, Khem and Beth/TaWee (Sold Project)

¹ North Park's Global Outreach Team seeks to provide up to date information designed to inform and equip people who serve around the world. GO Bulletins (GOB) are completed as our way of providing both guidance and policy towards this goal. Extensive research, prayer and reflection on best practice are used to create GO Bulletins. Research is completed in conversation with five long-standing Canadian Mission Agencies, the Canadian Council for Christian Charities, as well as the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). The reader is responsible to confirm the information. GO Bulletins are reviewed and updated as needed.