

Florida-Bahamas Synod Global Mission

Immersion Journey Leader Activity and Check List

This list is intended to help keep you and your group on track with planning a successful mission trip to a companion church country where everyone returns safely, happy and healthy, and eager to share their experience. A lot goes into planning a trip to another country and even the best laid plans can go awry – so don't forget to let everyone know that flexibility will be key to ensuring the purpose of the trip is still achieved.

As Immersion Journey Leader (IJL) you will have certain responsibilities for preparing the group for the upcoming experience in a foreign country and culture, keeping track of them during the trip, and getting their feedback and trip evaluations afterwards. Delegate where and when appropriate however, as you don't have to do it alone.

9-6 months prior to the trip date

- Consult with the Companion Church Leaders – what is the purpose of the trip? Is there a project to be worked on? Has a Project Concept Note (PCN) been submitted to the sub-committee and Global Mission Committee for approval? Is there a budget to be mindful of? Will you be working with other Companion Church members on the project in line with our accompaniment model?
- How many people can be reasonably accommodated on this trip? Remember to consider transportation needs, housing, and feeding large groups of people can place a burden on the host country.
- Are VISAs needed for entry and travel in this Companion Church country? What is the cost and how will they be obtained?
- Are any immunizations needed for traveling in this country? Refer individuals to County Health Departments to obtain needed vaccines or medications.
- Are there special gifts/talents you will be needing for this trip/project? (Construction skills, health training, teaching skills or materials)
- What is the estimated cost of the trip? Consider including a fixed amount each person will contribute to the companion church or project. Don't forget to consider what may be needed to pay translators/drivers/cooks etc. Be sure to discuss and plan for fundraising to help with costs.
- Work with the GMC Chair on promoting this trip throughout the Synod through the E-Spirit, Synod website, GMC newsletter or special mailings. Consider writing articles for local newspapers if appropriate.
- Schedule at least 3 phone conference call dates for the Orientation sessions. Consider including a leader from the Companion Church on the first call who can provide information and answer questions on cultural expectations, logistics of travel in the country, and other items.
- Consider asking someone to help with ensuring all traveler forms are complete and sent in, all airline tickets are purchased, trip deposit money is received, Passports are up to date, monitor traveler participation in Orientation Sessions, etc.

6-3 months prior to the trip date

- Begin Orientation Sessions. There are several objectives for the Orientation Sessions.
 - Help participants understand that this visit is another expression of Accompaniment between both churches
 - Review Accompaniment values
 - Help participants discern why they are going to a companion church or institution, the history of the companion and its mission priorities
 - Help participants understand the expectations before, during, and after the trip
 - Develop and commit to a Group Covenant
 - Identify individual gifts to contribute to the mission
 - Inspire participants to take leadership roles in components of the mission trip (taking pictures, videotaping, translating, leading devotions, etc.)
- Resources for the Orientation Sessions include- your personal experience in participating or leading mission travel groups; Companion Church leaders; ELCA Global Mission materials, including the “Welcome Forward” booklet and CD, and Short-Term Mission Covenant and Release forms; Global Mission travel application and evaluation forms; other travelers with group mission travel experience.

3 months prior to the trip date

- Ensure that all logistics in the Companion country are firmed up (as much as they can be) and any mission project materials needed are ordered.
- Check with each traveler regarding necessary documents, travel arrangements to the airport, personal care or health needs, any concerns for individuals/family members who will be left at home during the time of travel.
- Check with each traveler on their fundraising status and if there are any financial concerns you should be aware of.
- Develop list of travelers to be sent to the Synod office, along with first page of travel application with Emergency Contact information.
- Develop Daily Devotional guide/schedule for group.
- Develop daily itinerary – print and share with group travelers and Synod office.

1 month prior to the trip date

- Begin packing! Be sure you have covered in your Orientation discussions cultural norms about appropriate dress for men and women in the country you will be visiting. Don't forget to discuss weather conditions, climate, luggage limitations, voltage, safety tips while in country, ATM availability (or lack thereof and need for local currency), Internet connection availability, etc. Pack accordingly!
- Communicate with Companion Church leaders on last minute details.
- Make sure pastors and congregations are aware of the group's trip and ask for their prayers while the group is traveling. Consider asking the pastor to conduct a “sending” or “commissioning” rite during the service the week before they leave or, include in the last orientation session.
- Consider a WHATSAPP group for all participants to be able to share photos and general announcements while traveling.

1 week prior to the trip date

- Connect with group members for any last-minute concerns/issues. Help them to stay focused on the positives of the trip and being open to new experiences. Remind them of the need to remain calm and flexible. (You too!)

Travel Date

Godspeed and safe travels! Thanks be to God!

Return from Travel

- Remind the group to complete the Immersion Journey Evaluation Form and return it to the IJL or Global Mission Committee chairperson. (Don't forget to complete one yourself).
- Schedule a "debriefing" conference call to allow group members to share some highlights of the trip, their "re-entry" experience, and how they plan to share this experience with their friends, family, and congregation.
- Consider sending photos and articles to the E-Spirit and Global Mission newsletter, local newspapers and radio or TV stations, Living Lutheran, Gather, and Café magazines.
- Send thank-you notes to Companion Church leaders as appropriate.
- Be sure to discuss any concerns/findings/notable experiences with the Global Mission Committee chairperson that may impact future mission trips or the Companion Synod-Church relationship.

Additional Forms and resources:

Florida-Bahamas Synod – Companion Church Immersion Journey Application Form

Mission Trip Thoughts – by Dr. Ken Vermillion, Chair, Haiti Task Force

Welcome Forward – ELCA Global Mission book and CD

Short Term Mission Covenant and Release

Reflect & Respond Questions for Immersion Journey Participants

Immersion Journey Evaluation Form

Health Insurance information

ELCA Short Term Mission Trip Planning Forms