Mission Trip or Vacation with a Purpose?

By Holly Newman

One of the core values at First Baptist Church of Lodi is for each of us begin to see ourselves as “World Christians.” This means that though we live in Lodi and we worship with this particular local body of believers, we are just as much a part of the world wide body of Christ, and what God is doing all over the world.

How this works out in practicality is that we at FBC:
1. Regularly pray specifically for God’s work in other countries
2. Designate a significant portion of our church budget to missionaries who are living and working outside of the US, as well as praying for them.
3. Regularly promote a broad church awareness of God’s worldwide work.
4. Occasionally send one or more church or staff members to minister alongside our mission partners and help them in their context. These trips are usually called “short term missions projects” and often represent a fundraising opportunity as well.

In the last year we have sent several teams to Tanzania, mostly to assist with teaching in the Bible school and developing their primary school. We also sent a team to Assam, India to oversee and further our work at the Learning to Hope school there, and one to San Nicolas, Mexico to partner with church member Juan Ibarra and his work there with at-risk youth. Men’s ministry has also sent several teams to Porvenir, Mexico to assist with construction projects for Olive Tree Ministries.

The Missions Committee at FBC consists of Linda and Pete Wick, Steve Huck, Carol Alexander, Dawnette Person, Steve Jordan, Penny Beckman, and Steve and Holly Newman. They have recently been revising and developing our policies regarding short term missions (STM) in order to sharpen our focus and be sure we are using our talents and financial resources to the greatest possible extent.

One of the questions that immediately arose to the committee was “What is the purpose of STM trips?” Is it primarily a journey to an exotic place that is mostly fun, but also fulfills some ministry? Is it largely about how much the trip impacts the person going? Or should the trip’s main purpose be the specific work that is done? How can we be sure that what we plan to do on the mission field actually needs to be done by a foreigner and could not be done by a person living locally?

After much discussion, researching what other churches are doing, reading a couple of books, and praying, our FBC Missions Committee has developed some guidelines for STM that we are very excited about. Our desire is for our work both here and elsewhere to be very intentional and directed by prayer.

Anyone wishing to lead or participate in a STM will begin by applying for approval for the project with the Missions Committee if funds are to be raised from our church body. Priority will be given to those trips that are focused on doing specific ministry with long range impact that has been requested by the receiving missionary. The cost/benefit ratio will be considered in approving a project. The team should be developed around the gifts and talents that are especially needed in the situation, which in turn means that we at FBC are being good stewards of our financial resources and time.

While a “vacation with a purpose” will not be discouraged, it is possible that in those situations, the person(s) will be urged to self-fund and not do
fundraising within our body. This would be the case when the ministry element is smaller and has less focus within the trip, or there is little supervision that will be given. In addition, while significant change and enrichment should definitely happen to the person taking a STM trip, that is not the primary purpose of a it.

The introductory paragraph on the application to go on a STM includes:

'We are excited that you have an interest in going on a short term mission. Jesus Christ has called us to reach the entire world, every nation and every people. We like to look at short term missions in light of stewardship considerations. God has entrusted to us individually and corporately as a church a certain amount of time, money, and talents. We want to do what we can to approach short term missions in the most responsible way, giving adequate supervision and preparation so that the mission of Christ around the world can be most effectively carried out, and so that you can have the best and most life impacting experience."

After the trip itself has been approved, potential team members will submit individual applications and be interviewed to ensure that they have the needed gifts to align with the purpose of the trip, adequate spiritual maturity and experience, health, and willingness to do the work required to raise the funds, prepare for the trip, and do the work in country. Training is required of all STM team members, and on return they are debriefed to assess some of the ways the Lord has worked and what changes may be made personally. Most STM members will be given an opportunity to join the Missions Committee, and encouraged to take a fuller role in church ministry as God leads them as part of the outworking of their missions experience.

Steve Huck is the most recent addition to the Missions Committee, joining after he and his son returned from several weeks partnering with Hope of the Nations in Kigoma, Tanzania in 2013. Although Steve had gone on other STM trips in past years, he decided he now wanted to have more input on the direction of our missions involvement through being part of this committee.

As we prayerfully do our part in fulfilling the Great Commission, STM trips are a way to have direct and meaningful involvement as the Lord leads us. Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28: 18-20