

Ministry to Children at Risk



I. Background Information on Street Children

The estimate most commonly quoted, by UNICEF and many other agencies, is that there are 100-150 million children who live or work on the streets of the developing world. During your short-term trip, you may notice some of these children while driving through the city. In Nicaragua, for example, you will encounter street children at the airport, trying to help with your

luggage; and at intersections, begging, washing windshields, or selling merchandise. Most of these children still live with their families, but because they are very poor, they spend much of their time on the streets trying to supplement their families' income.

Some of these children, however, actually live and sleep on the streets full-time. The projects sponsored by Arms of Love receive these "hardcore" street children, who have no home and no family caring for them. Arms of Love also receives children who may have a temporary living situation, but because they have been orphaned, abandoned, or severely abused by their families, they are at imminent risk of living and sleeping on the streets full-time if we do not help them.

Street children live in abandoned buildings, back alleys, parks, garbage dumps, cemeteries, and other public places. During the day, they will tend to hang out in places with significant pedestrian traffic, such as street corners, markets, bus terminals, and ferry buildings. When they are young, street children are often able to subsist by begging or selling trinkets. As they grow older, however, people tend to have less compassion on them, and they will typically resort to petty theft and prostitution to survive.

For these reasons, street children tend to be scorned by others in the community and are frequently the victims of physical abuse and violence. Such violence may be perpetrated by adults in the community, corrupt law enforcement, or other street children. Violence initiated by adults and police officers is sometimes prompted by suspicion of crime, but on other occasions is without cause or provocation.

In Latin America, most street children are addicted to inhalants. As you travel through the city, you may notice some street children with small glass jars in their hands, perhaps holding the jars under their noses. It is said that such inhalants help alleviate hunger and cause the children to temporarily forget about their current circumstances. More than 95% of street children in Latin America use

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drugs on a daily basis, most commonly solvents or shoe glue. As a result, most street children develop an intense drug addiction which causes serious physiological damage.

Street children are also very sexually active. Their longing to be loved combined with the lack of any guidance or family structure, leads to such activity. According to one study, about 70% have one or two sexual partners per day, while about 25% have four or more partners per day (typically indicative of prostitution). As a result, a majority of street children contract sexually transmitted diseases.



Street children are the result of family disintegration, the breakdown of the nuclear family. Such disintegration results from a combination of factors, including the death or abandonment of one or both parents, physical and sexual abuse, and economic stress due to extreme poverty. Many street children are orphaned or abandoned; other children come from abusive home environments that cause the children to choose life on the streets. In our country, such children are placed in government-run children's shelters or in foster homes. In developing countries, however, governments often lack any facilities or programs to care for such children, so the children must learn to survive on their own.

In many cases, street children come out of a long process of family disintegration and gradual assimilation into the street culture. For example, a child's father might abandon his wife and child, leaving the mother to provide for her children. The mother then begins to work, and because she cannot afford childcare, her children begin spending much of their time on the streets (even if they are attending school, because in many countries, school is only in session for half days). If the mother is a low wage earner or becomes unemployed, the children will begin to use their time on the streets to beg or try to raise money or food in some other way. In the process, they develop relationships with other street children.

Eventually, the mother might abandon her children—out of desperation and an inability to care for them—perhaps becoming a street prostitute and drug addict herself. A relative or a Good Samaritan might provide the children with a place to sleep temporarily, but the children are now spending all of their days on the streets, begging and trying to support themselves. Eventually, the children begin living and sleeping on the streets full time, because they have no family and no long-term living situation.

Adolescent street girls face a unique and more complex set of emotional issues than boys. It has been estimated that 80% of street girls turn to prostitution as a means for survival, and they develop strong economic and emotional relationships with pimps or protectors. Since contraceptives are rarely used, pregnancies and self-induced abortions are very common among street girls. One researcher in Brazil concluded that 40% of under-age prostitutes self-induce abortions “by the most rudimentary methods”—others simply abandon their infants. Moreover, street girls typically continue sniffing glue and using other drugs while pregnant. This results in some babies being stillborn, while other infants have serious birth defects.

What happens to street children? Without a place to live, an education, or job skills, they will be unable to find work, particularly in countries where work is very scarce to begin with. As they grow older, the boys will become increasingly involved in crime as a means of survival, and the vast majority will end up in adult prisons. The girls will become involved in prostitution and will typically experience multiple pregnancies and self-induced abortions. They may eventually find a mate, but their boyfriend or husband is likely to be abusive and/or irresponsible himself, and the cycle of poverty and street life will continue. Some street children will eventually die on the streets, either as a result of violence (e.g., being killed while committing a crime or on suspicion of having committed a crime) or as a result of a drug overdose.

II. Profile of a Street Child

While all children are unique individuals, there are some characteristics that tend to appear in children who live on the streets, such as:

- They are deeply wounded. Although many street children, at some point, “choose” to begin living on the streets, this “choice” was not purely volitional. Street children live on the streets because someone, somewhere, did something to them first. Typically, such children have suffered physical or sexual abuse, and have experienced the death or abandonment of one or both parents. They may be angry, aggressive, or obnoxious, but underneath the surface, they are very hurt.
- Street children are on survival mode. Their entire focus is on getting through the day. They live for the moment, give no thought to tomorrow, and have no hopes or dreams for the future.



- Street children often travel in groups, but it is more for their protection than for intimidation. They care for one another and form close relationships.
- Street children long for physical contact, but they are also afraid of it. If you reach for them they might be surprised, and may be unsure of what you are going to do. Remember, they typically have suffered physical abuse and mistreatment while living on the street. If you touch them, do so affectionately but slowly; make it their choice.
- The longer children live on the streets, the more they have gone through, the harder their hearts become, the more wounded they are, and the angrier, more frustrated and confused they are. Younger children are not necessarily easier to work with. The hardness of a street child is not determined by his age, but by the length of time he has lived on the streets.
- In addition to their sexual activities, some street children may have homosexual tendencies. Such tendencies often originate from the need to do whatever is necessary to survive.

III. Differences Between Boys and Girls

Again, here are some generalized characteristics that tend to appear in boys vs. girls:

- Boys run in gangs with a hierarchy; girls almost always have a pimp or protector.
- Boys express their pain in violence; girls express their pain in emotional desperation.
- Boys, given something they can succeed at, begin to feel good about themselves and begin to heal. Girls can do many things wonderfully but will tend to focus upon, and become self-critical over, a single mistake.
- The healing process for adolescent-age street girls tends to be slower and is hindered by emotional baggage, including the emotional attachment to the “protector” (pimp), who has often convinced the girl that he is the only one who will love her and protect her. He ties her to himself by convincing her that she is unlovable and that he is the only person, not only in the whole city, but in the whole world that can love her—and that she is lucky to have him and had better do whatever necessary to make him happy

IV. Ministry to Children in a Children's Home

They need to feel special and loved. Play with them. Twirl them around, tickle them, play sports with them, play games with them. They have a special need to feel loved, wanted, cherished, and cared for.

Always follow the instructions of the staff.

You do not know the children or their backgrounds. You do not know the circumstances and events which have preceded you, and you do not know the programs, processes, and means of discipline which have been implemented to help the children. Each child may be under a specific, individualized plan of care, designed to meet their specific psychological, emotional, educational, and behavioral needs. You may not always understand the staff's instructions—follow them anyway. If you have a serious concern, raise it with the team leader.

Make the children your focus. Pour yourselves out to them. They will remember you for you.

Don't give the children money, candy, or other gifts.

This tends to reinforce the habits they learned on the streets where every time they saw someone they held their hands out. We want to break their habit of asking for things from people, whether by words or by conduct, and instead build healthy relationships with them. That doesn't come from giving them things. It comes from loving them and spending time with them.

My children provide an excellent example of this. When my mother ("Grammy") comes to visit, she always brings the children presents. When my wife's mother, ("Grandma") comes to visit, she rarely brings presents, but spends a lot of time with the children reading books and interacting with them. So, when my children see Grammy they always want to know, "What did you bring me?" And when they see Grandma, they run up to her and say, "Read me this book."

When short-term teams visit our children's homes, we want the children to look forward to the love and affection they will receive, not the receipt of gifts or other material things. By giving the children gifts, you may not only be reinforcing habits they learned on the streets—always having their hand out—but you may damage the ministry of subsequent short-term teams by creating certain expectations among the children.

Candy may seem like an innocent gift. But in the Philippines project, for example, the sugar intake of the children is carefully controlled. If team members begin giving sugar to the children, it can seriously affect their behavior and destabilize the program.

Another reason it is important not to give the children gifts is that the children's home is carefully controlling what gifts the children receive as part of their overall

program of care. Among other things, the children's home wants to control what the children receive in order to teach the children the value of material things and avoid spoiling them.

Gifts and "treats" may also be used as part of the home's system of discipline, i.e., prizes or treats may be awarded for good behavior, or withheld for inappropriate behavior. By giving things to the children, you may be inadvertently undermining the system of discipline and positive reinforcement in place within the home.

For example, one team bought a soccer ball and gave it to the children. What the group did not know is that for many months, the children in the home had been told that the first child who was on good behavior for an entire month would be given a soccer ball as a prize. By coming in and giving the children a soccer ball, the team inadvertently undermined the system of positive reinforcement that had been in place for months.

As another example, one short-term team spoiled the children living in a children's home, throwing parties and taking them on outings. During the trip, the team gave each child an expensive (\$20) gift. After the team left, one of the children—a boy about eight years old—called a meeting with the other children, and proposed that they no longer had to obey the staff, they only needed to wait for short-term teams to come and give them things.

You cannot appreciate the many, varied ways in which giving the children gifts can negatively impact them or undermine the program of the children's home. Therefore, please observe and respect this rule. If you would like to give gifts to the children, a special treat, or take them on an outing, discuss it with the Director of the Children's Home first to determine if it is appropriate.

It is appropriate to leave the children with a small, inexpensive gift as a memento of your visit. The gift should derive its value from being a reminder of the time the children spent with you. A craft that your team creates with the children is a good example of such a "gift." Even here, however, all gifts must be given to or approved by the Director of the Children's Home. Therefore, discuss the appropriateness of the gift with the Director of the Children's Home before the short-term trip, so expectations are not damaged during the trip and team members are not disappointed.

General guidelines for interacting with the children

Many of the children have been sexually active, and may have habits of inappropriate touching or sensuality, even if they are young. If you feel that a child is touching you inappropriately, don't over-react or run from the situation. And don't stand there not knowing what to do. Lovingly set the child aside and

say “not like that, like this.” Teach appropriate touching and appropriate behaviors. We are trying to break old habits and teach appropriate behaviors.

Be aware that children may be under discipline. As discussed previously, this is one of the reasons you should not give things to the children or take them on an outing, without the permission of the staff.

Even though you are a guest in the home, it is of great help to the workers in the home if you submit yourself to the house rules. For example, if a ball is kicked over the wall of the home or onto the roof, don't just go for it. Most homes have rules that kids can't climb the wall or be on the roof; if you do that you may be setting an example that is counter-productive to the ministry. Set a good example by asking permission to go and get the ball. As another example, eat everything that is given to you. Most homes have the policy of being thankful for the Lord's provision and don't have the luxury of catering to every child's preference.

The children are watching you and will likely follow your example; make it a good one.

Street children are good thieves. Don't leave any valuables (e.g., watches, cameras, money) laying around. Not just because you might lose something, but because you are putting temptation in their path. We are trying to break the children of the habit of stealing, gradually bringing them along where they can handle those kinds of situations. So don't tempt them.

These children have lived by their wits for years, and they may have been in the children's home for only a few weeks or months. Think of how hard it is to break old habits—they need time to break theirs. The children also bear significant emotional wounds and scars from past abuse and abandonment, which may give rise to negative behaviors. You don't know their background or what they've been through. So don't be critical or judgmental toward the children; instead be kind, considerate, understanding, and supportive.

Be gentle in correction. If a child behaves in an inappropriate manner, demonstrate appropriate behavior and play. These children have never had guidance. Never just say “no” to a child, but demonstrate what is appropriate.

Don't promise to write. If you fail, you will devastate the child (or adult). If you decide to write when you get home, just do it. Don't make promises, even if you are convinced you will keep them. Also, consider writing to an entire home, rather than just one child; then include specific comments for specific children within your letter. This helps alleviate any jealousy among the children.

Do not provide financial support directly to any of the nationals, including the local pastor and staff. It works best to provide financial support through a single



centralized source, which can ensure that funds are being distributed in a manner that is fair, equitable, and proportionate to need. Providing money directly to a national (other than through the local ministry) can lead to a wide variety of problems, including inequities and jealousies—and having to say “no” may cause hurt feelings.

Moreover, most of the nationals can probably use extra financial help, and the one who contacts you may not be the one who most needs the help. If you would like to help a particular individual, talk to Arms of Love in the U.S., and we will assess the situation in consultation with our Country Director.

Don't give out your address or telephone number to the children, to the staff, or even to the national pastors. If you write to the home, send it to the Director of the Children's Home. You can invite

them to respond through Arms of Love. Many times, nationals will contact you and ask for money, which can lead to the problems discussed above.

When a child runs away, our attitude should be, “Hey, we missed you. Are you okay? Would you like to try again?” Do not be critical or condemning. It is very difficult to make the adjustment from the street environment of complete freedom to a structured home environment.

Be supportive of the staff. Caring for 8-12 street children, who have significant needs and difficult behaviors, is a very challenging task. If you are a parent, think of the days you have had difficulty caring for a few “normal” children, and the stress that results. Now imagine what it might be like caring for 8-12 children who used to live on the streets, who have been abandoned and abused, who have significant emotional needs. So if a staff member is having difficulty or is struggling, be an encourager. Many staff members may also be new to their jobs and are still learning how to best work with the children. Don't be critical or judgmental. Encourage them and pray for them when appropriate.

Children with addictions require a lot of prayer and love—pray for them often.

Don't ask a national if you can break a rule. Many times the national will be too embarrassed to say no, or the national will want to please you as a supporter of the project, so he will say yes—even if he knows it is not in the best interest of the project/children. This can also have a very negative effect on relationships,

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as conflict may result between the one who allowed you to break the rule and others on the staff.

Be a vessel of love. Don't judge the children, don't be angry with them, and don't blame them. Just love them. "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8.

Relationships

I. The Importance of Focusing on Relationships

Our relationship with God is the only thing that has eternal significance. Nothing else is more deserving of our focus than our relationship with Him and the impact we have on His relationship with others.

The purpose of a trip is to advance against the kingdom stake in this spiritual our own relationship strengthening and God's relationship should come as no in an effort to mission trip and of that trip, Satan will relationship with God relationships with others.



short-term mission God's kingdom of darkness. At battle are not only with God, but the restoration of with others. It surprise, then, that undermine your diminish the impact attack your and your

Consider the story of Job. The trials of Job, instigated by Satan, included the loss of his possessions, his children, and his health. Satan's purpose, in all of these trials, was to damage Job's relationship with God, and ultimately, to persuade Job to turn away from God. This is Satan's ultimate objective: to alienate us from God. And he may also seek to undermine our relationships with others in the process. (See Job 1:9, 42:7)

To maximize the effectiveness of your mission trip, focus on protecting, developing, and strengthening your relationships: your relationship with God, who conducts ministry through you; and your relationships other team members and local believers, with whom you are engaged in ministry—all of which depends upon, and flows from, the state of your heart.

II. The State of Your Heart

Recognize that everything you have belongs to God. It has been given to you for a time, to be used for His glory.

It is very easy to view the things we have in life as being ours. We often think in terms of my job, my family, my house, my country, my friends, my car, my savings, my retirement. Yet all of these things can disappear in an instant. They are blessings we receive from God, which are not ours, but His. We have no right of ownership over anything in life.

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21.

Serving God effectively means giving up our sense of “rights,” which is so engrained in our American culture: our right to eat certain foods or dress a certain way; our right to certain material possessions and a particular way of life; our right to certain freedoms, our culture and our country. It is only when we give up all of these “rights” that God can send us where He wants us to go and use us in the way He wants, uninhibited and unrestrained by the cares, concerns, and things of this world.

Jesus was the ultimate example for us. To be used by God, to accomplish God’s purposes, Jesus had to give up all of His “rights.” And so Paul says that our attitude should be the same as His:

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Phil 2:6-8.

To have an impact, we must be humble, broken servants of Jesus Christ

Without humility, patience, and brokenness, you will be unable to successfully work through the many problems and difficulties which Satan will throw at you during the trip. Moreover, without an honest, open, and broken heart, you will be ineffective in reaching others in this hardened, cynical, skeptical world.

Think of the picture of the potter molding a pot of clay. When it doesn’t come out right, he breaks it and starts again. Our hearts need to be broken by God. We need to humbly submit to God’s touch and recognize that His ways are right, and ours are wrong; that He is holy, and we are in rebellion; that His Word is true, and our ideas rubbish. Then our hearts begin to be broken, and God can use us more effectively in ministering to others and sharing the gospel.

Your humility and your brokenness will contribute far more to your effectiveness in ministering to others than your theological prowess, memorization of Scripture, or knowledge of the latest missiological trends.

“...on the way, they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.’ Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him into His arms, He said to them, ‘Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.’ Mark 9:34-37.



“So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the

Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you." John 13:12-15.

Pray for continuing softness of heart, not callousness of heart

When we encounter extreme poverty and people with great needs, it is easy to become desensitized to those needs. It is a human protection mechanism, to develop a callousness of heart in order to protect the heart from emotions of sadness, helplessness, confusion, and yes, guilt. But this is a human response, not God's response. Imagine if God stopped feeling compassionate toward our own desperate condition, and developed a hardness of heart toward us!

Don't become overwhelmed with the poverty and the needs and react by shutting off your emotions. We need to maintain a softness of heart to effectively minister to people. This is the meaning of compassion – to feel the sorrow, the pain, and the hurts of others. Don't stop feeling, just to protect yourself.

Pray for toughness of heart, so you don't become overwhelmed

While we need to maintain a softness of heart, we also need to maintain a toughness of heart. This might also be called perseverance. Pray that God will sustain you with a stamina of the heart, so you can continue to reach out to the poor and the needy without becoming emotionally overwhelmed with the magnitude of the needs and the desperate nature of their condition.

Set appropriate expectations

It is important to evaluate and scrutinize your expectations before you go. Whether your expectations are met will have a direct impact on whether your trip is rewarding and fulfilling or discouraging and disappointing. Therefore, (1) set appropriate expectations, and (2) realize that it is unlikely you'll meet all your expectations.

There is nothing wrong with high expectations. But make sure your expectations are realistic. And whatever expectations you have, place your expectations in God. Expect God to work through you and accomplish His purposes. This is one expectation that will always be met: that God will use you to accomplish His purposes, if you allow Him. Expectations in God will never disappoint you, because God is always faithful to His promises.

- Expect to be frustrated. You will always encounter the unexpected. Allow God to use unforeseen situations to accomplish great things in your life and in the lives of others.
- Expect to forgive, and to ask for forgiveness. You will make mistakes, and so will others.
- Be flexible. Plans will change. Yield to God's plans. Allow God to use you in any way He wants, regardless of whether it's on your schedule.
- Expect spiritual attack. Be prepared for spiritual warfare.

Remember that tangible “success” is not your goal. Look for the opportunities God is providing you while you are there; look for ways to become a part of what God is doing. Even if you don’t accomplish some visible measure of success, if you allow yourself to be used by God, He will accomplish His purposes through you.

Keep focused on the purpose of the trip, which is to give God glory

“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” I Cor. 10:31.

“I do not seek My glory ... If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me.” John 8:50, 54.

Don’t take rejection personally or become discouraged – God is at work, and the results are up to Him, not us

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.” I Cor. 3:6-7.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11



Remember S.F.I.N.C.

Smile

Flexible

Improvise

No **C**omplaining

III. Relationship with God

Trust the strength of God to be manifest in your weakness

Paul wrote, “There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” II Cor. 12:7-10.

During your upcoming mission trip, you will encounter a variety of hardships and difficulties. Your existing weaknesses are likely to be magnified, and being in a radically different situation and culture may reveal new weaknesses. But in our weaknesses, God's strength can be revealed.

It is our nature (and culture) to try and accomplish tasks by our own ability and strength. But when we try to accomplish tasks by ourselves, we preclude God from working through us. Much less is accomplished, and God is not glorified. By contrast, when we recognize our weaknesses and put our trust in God to work through us, mighty things can be accomplished, and God is glorified.

Being in a very different culture, a different country, a different economic situation—all of this will sometimes make you feel overwhelmed and incapable of performing the tasks God has placed before you. Praise God, because it is in our weakness that we are forced to look to Him for our help and our strength. Trust in God, and watch Him work through you and be glorified in the process. It may be the greatest faith-building experience of your life.

Spend daily time in prayer and in the Word

It is easy to allow the pressures of the trip to crowd out your time with the Lord. The daytime will be filled with a busy schedule of activities, and physical exertion may tempt you to spend any other available time sleeping. It becomes easy to sacrifice personal prayer or Bible study when there is so much else to do during a very short period of time in another country [so much to do... so little time...]

Don't sacrifice your time with Him; make it your top priority. All of your work and effort will be ineffective unless God is in it. Moreover, it is not just your work that He seeks, but your heart. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matt. 22:37. You cannot do this without spending time with Him.



Listen to what God is saying to you through prayer and through His Word. Share your heart with Him; He is your closest and most treasured companion on this trip. Let Him encourage you, strengthen you, and direct you. His primary means of doing so is through prayer and His Word. Moreover, prayer allows God to work through us and gives Him the glory for what is accomplished.

So schedule regular time for prayer and devotions each day. Individual devotions should be part of the team schedule, to make it easier for you, but then don't use that time for something else.

Remember that God is the source of your physical and emotional strength

“God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1.

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Phil. 4:13.

Persevere and seek God when you begin to feel empty

“[God] will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.” Rom. 2:6-7.

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matt. 6:33.

“You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” Psalm 16:11

Recognize that you are engaged in a spiritual battle; prepare and conduct yourself accordingly

“Jesus was going through all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.” Matt. 4:23, 9:35.

“Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. ... ‘As you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.’” Matt. 10: 1, 7-8.

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Eph. 6:12.

“Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit ...” Eph. 6:13-18.

Trust God in the use of spiritual gifts; be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit

“To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and

to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." I Cor. 12:7-11.

Expect frustration; put your hope and security in Jesus alone

"We exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Rom. 5:3-4.

IV. Relationships with Nationals

Spend time with the children and other nationals

Resist the urge to spend most of your time exclusively with other team members. You can spend time with them at home. You did not fly thousands of miles to visit with your friends, but to impact the host country for Christ. Make the nationals your focus.

The most fulfilling part of your trip may be the relationships you form with the children and with other nationals. You cannot develop relationships without spending time with them. So play with the children, interact with the nationals. Even if you do not know the language, you can develop friendships through your conduct, your warmth, your love, and your smiles.

This is also where you are likely to have the most impact. You have an opportunity to touch people's lives, to love the children and other nationals. There's no substitute for that, no way to place a monetary value on that. This is the reason for going on a short-term trip; otherwise, you could simply stay home and send financial support to the ministry.

Exchange personal stories and histories with your national hosts. Listen to them. Express interest in them and their stories.

Don't talk about your big job, your big house or your big country. The nationals already look at you as rich. Even if they ask you how much something costs, particularly if it is something expensive, gracefully avoid the question. Focus on sharing about your big God, not what you own or your standard of living back home.



Remember that we are there to serve them and minister with them, not to them.

When we view ourselves as ministering to the nationals, we are harboring and fostering a subtle attitude of superiority. We are all equal in the eyes of God and equal in the body of Christ. We are working alongside the national church, in partnership with them, to reach their community for Christ.

“Even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews of Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” I Cor. 12:12-13.

Focus on, and live out, the words of Christ:

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matt. 20:26-28.

Avoid talking about your own culture or cultural differences; focus on similarities

Focusing on similarities tends to build bonds. Conversely, focusing on differences can very easily, even if unintentionally, lead to debate over what is “better” and become divisive.

If a conversation does shift toward comparing lifestyles or cultures, do not feel that it is necessary to denigrate your own lifestyle or culture; just be exceedingly careful not to communicate that it is somehow superior to theirs.

Transcend cross-cultural differences with God’s culture

Cross-cultural differences exist, and they need to be recognized and responded to appropriately. In building relationships, however, don’t focus too much on “our culture” and “their culture.” Think about God’s culture. “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.” Eph. 2:19.

At all times, live according to His direction and His commands. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... Love your neighbor as yourself.” Matt. 22:37-39. Differences in language and culture will result in some misunderstandings and mistakes, even offense. But if you live according to God’s culture, and love the nationals as you love yourself, relationships will be formed across (and despite) our different cultures.

Encourage the local staff and missionaries

The national believers (or the missionaries) working in and overseeing the project are people just like you. They can become discouraged by a wide range of things: the lack of financial support for their work, poor evangelical response, cultural issues, the difficulties working with street children, and various other set-

backs they may have experienced in their work. Do not be judgmental; be an encourager. Your prayers, positive praise, and affirmation can have a significant impact on them.

Submit to the local leadership and staff

The local pastor and staff are the ones God has placed in leadership in the local church and project. The objective of your team is to assist them in the ministry God has called them to. Accordingly, it is important that you submit to their leadership.

“Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.” 1 Cor. 16:15-16.

In this context, the word “submit” is used to mean “voluntary yielding in love.”

Failing to submit to the leadership of the local church and project is not only unbiblical, but it can create significant problems for the local ministry. When other nationals observe that you do not defer to the local leadership, but ignore or override their decisions, it will undermine their authority and their ability to lead.

Also bear in mind that the local leadership has been engaged in their ministry for months (or years) before your arrival, and will continue long after you depart. They know the local people and culture, and they are in tune with what God is doing. Therefore, defer to their judgment and leadership in all things pertaining to the local church and project, as they are in a far superior position to make decisions pertaining to such ministry.



Show love for the people; love transcends all barriers

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35.

“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one

another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.” 1 Pet. 2:22-23.

Be quick to say you’re sorry. Be willing to confess your sins. Don’t wait for the other person to apologize first.

Become like the people; observe what they do; identify with them

V. Relationships with Other Team Members

Readily and freely forgive others and request forgiveness when offenses occur

Take the initiative to ask forgiveness when you have done something wrong or when you have offended someone (even if unintentional). Relationships deteriorate and become damaged with the passage of time, as offenses linger and fester and each person waits for the other to make the first move.



Jesus emphasized the importance of being reconciled with one another: “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” Matt. 5:23-24.

Conversely, if someone else has wronged you, humbly, gently and lovingly let the person know—in private. Do everything possible to make it easy for the other person to admit the wrong and to ask forgiveness. Don’t be accusatory; ask questions. There may be more to the situation than you are aware. If the person fails to recognize their offense, continue to love them anyway. If the situation remains unresolved and is creating difficulty, bring the team leader into the situation (or another person, if it’s the team leader you are confronting). Healing and restoration are important to the effectiveness of the team and the success of the trip.

Submit to the team leadership and communicate any issues which arise

A team is only effective when everyone is moving in the same direction, working toward the same goals. This is only possible when everyone on the team is submitting to leadership, including the team leader and the national leadership. Failing to do so will cause discord and disunity, which can undermine the team and the entire trip.

Failing to follow leadership can also bring harm to you personally. The team leader or the national leadership often provide instructions with your own health and safety in mind. For example, heat exhaustion has been known to make people collapse and can sneak up on you; if your team leader asks you to get out of the sun, follow his instructions. Don’t argue with him.

If you are experiencing difficulties—physically, emotionally, or otherwise—tell the team leader. Nothing can be done unless you communicate the situation to him or her.

As a team leader, I once watched a team member's health deteriorate because she did not inform me of certain dietary restrictions and medical conditions. I have also watched team relationships disintegrate because one person felt offended by several other team members, but refused to share what was bothering her until the end of the trip. Communication with the team leader is of paramount importance for the success of the entire team.

Let love cover all situations, every offense, every misunderstanding

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” I Peter 4:8.

In every situation, if you allow love to govern your response – your language and your conduct – your relationships will remain strong and will be strengthened.

Demonstrate humility when relating to one another, in your speech and your conduct

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” Phil. 2:3-4.

Encourage one another and lift each other up

“Encourage one another and build up one another.” I Thess. 5:11.

Pray for one another

“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” James 5:16.

Cross-Cultural Issues

I. The Cross-Cultural Experience

One of the foremost objectives of a short-term mission trip is to love the people—and when you spend time with the people and begin to develop relationships with them, you will necessarily experience their culture.

Spend time developing relationships with the nationals. Exchange personal stories and histories with them. Listen to them. Express interest in them. Pray with them. Minister with them. Encourage them. Don't just go on the trip and bury your head in a construction project—the local Christians will not be nearly as blessed, and you will miss the rewards of developing relationships with them.

Your cross-cultural experience and the relationships that you develop may be the most significant part of your trip—and may radically change the way you view

things at home. If it doesn't, it should. Visiting with Christians who live in a one-room shack made of scrap metal with a dirt floor—who are filled with joy because they know Christ—may cause you to re-evaluate the importance of buying a house with a Jacuzzi, or the adequacy of the current furniture in the youth room at your church. Your cross-cultural experience can help you value people over things, value relationships over your personal frustrations, expand your worldview to conform to God's perspective, and put your future plans into God's hands.

While a cross-cultural experience can have a very positive impact on your life and your worldview, it can also cause frustration, disappointment, tension, embarrassment, and confusion. Being in a different culture can be difficult. Familiar ways of doing things, of communicating with and relating to people, are completely absent; you lack the immediate support of the relatives and friends which you have at home; and you don't know how to act or what is expected of you.

Your ability to cope with, learn from, and be blessed by your cross-cultural experience depends primarily upon your attitude and your response. Thinking these issues through in advance, and preparing for them, is crucial to having a successful trip and a rewarding experience.

II. Our Attitude Toward Cross-Cultural Differences

The history of short-term missions is littered with stories of teams which, when encountering a different environment, reacted defensively, attacking the insects, the food, the clothes, the health habits, the lack of driving etiquette, the weather—everything which was uncomfortable for them.

Aren't you entitled to a little grumbling? Let's make this simple: No. Your conduct is reflective of your heart and is being observed by the nationals. In most instances, nationals take pride in their country and in their culture. Communicating a negative attitude toward the local culture or the country will cause feelings of disappointment, hurt, anger, and indignation among the nationals, and will erect barriers between you and them. The result can extend beyond inhibiting the effectiveness of your short-term trip—it may also damage the reputation of local missionaries and their relationship with the nationals.

If you absolutely cannot quench the urge to complain about something, complain to the team leader, not to nationals (which will risk damaging your relationship with them) or other team members (which will damage morale).

How you react to cultural differences depends primarily on your attitude. An appropriate attitude of openness, acceptance, and trust will help you respond positively and constructively when confronting cultural differences.

Our customs and lifestyles are not better, just different.

The most important thing to remember is that when you encounter differences in the national people—their customs, their lifestyles, their behavior—there is nothing about your culture that is “better” than theirs, just different. To use an obvious example, the last time I visited Southeast Asia, I saw a man in a restaurant eating all of his food (including rice) with his fingers. This was not rude or inappropriate, just a difference in culture.

There may be many things in another culture that make us uncomfortable or frustrated. When people in Latin America show up an hour late for a meeting or an event, they are not being rude, they simply have a different cultural concept of time. In some cultures, being punctual is actually considered rude.

Focus on the positive aspects of the other culture.

For example, in the Philippines and in Latin America, you will often find strong families; hospitality; the ability to live graciously on very little; creativity in music; skill in the art of relaxation; and the ability to positively enjoy being with many people continuously. We can learn from such aspects of other cultures and apply what we learn to our own lives.

Appreciate the other culture as a gift from God.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above.” James 1:17. Think of each culture as a gift from God. God created a stunning array of different people groups and gave them the capacity to make a variety of cultures – and He glories in their common praise and adoration. Cultures enrich the world God created

One word of caution: cultures are created by people, and people are sinners. Each culture will have many good qualities, but will also have exploitative and immoral qualities. Practices which are contrary to God’s Word should not be enshrined, respected and protected as simply constituting a different “culture,” as is often done by anthropologists. On the other hand, recognizing and appreciating the diversity with which God created us is essential for having a healthy attitude toward different cultures.

III. Barriers That Can Distort Communications and Perceptions

While your cross-cultural experience can have a significant, and positive, impact on your life, there are certain barriers that are not readily apparent which can alter your understanding and perception of people and events. Unless you learn to recognize and work through these barriers, you will become the victim of frequent miscommunications and will return home with an entirely erroneous perception of the people and the local ministry.

Some cultural differences are obvious and are easy to recognize and adjust to. Other barriers can distort your communications and perceptions without you realizing it. These invisible barriers are the most dangerous and can cause the

most damage, because you perceive and understand one thing when the reality is another.

We can categorize such barriers as falling within three broad categories: language, culture, and context. These factors are constantly at work, in varying combinations, and they may easily distort what you hear, observe, and perceive:

- What you understand someone to be saying may be very different from what they intend to communicate.
- What you observe may lead you to form opinions and conclusions that are far different from what the actual situation is.
- Imagine that everything you see and hear is being passed through three different lenses, or filters, each of which may cause distortion:

Language Context Culture

A. Language

If you don't speak the local language, and the person you are communicating with doesn't speak any English, this language barrier will make it difficult for you to communicate, but at least you won't assume that you know what the person is trying to say. It is when you know some of the local language, and/or the other person knows some English, that both of you may get into trouble, and misunderstandings often arise.

Don't take this the wrong way: language learning is an important and valuable way in which you can connect with the local people and their culture. Just be aware of the potential for miscommunication.

Example: A short-term team member in Latin America wanted to ask a girl about her grandmother, so she asked the girl about her "grande madre," combining the Spanish words for "grand" and "mother." Instead of being understood as "grandmother," however, it came across as "big mama."



Example: A caregiver told her English-speaking supervisor that one of the children had been repeatedly misbehaving the night before, so she "bit her" (this is what it sounded like). The supervisor said, "You bit her?" (demonstrating the act of biting). The worker said, "No, no. I beat her." Even more startled, the supervisor said, "You beat her?" The worker said, "Yes, I beat her," and then explained how she spanked the girl once on the back of her leg. From her initial comments, one could have concluded that the caregiver had "beaten" the child, i.e., physically abusing her—what had really happened was much different. But "beat" was the only English word the caregiver knew to express what had happened. This exchange led to further discussions about appropriate measures of discipline, but

if the misunderstanding had gone uncorrected, there could have been much more serious consequences.

So when you are engaging in conversation with a national, and one of you is speaking in her second language, be aware that your understanding of a word or a phrase may be quite different from what the other person intends to communicate (and vice versa). Don't automatically assume that you understand what the other person is trying to say. Even when speaking through a bilingual translator, misunderstandings sometimes occur. If something doesn't sound right—or if it is important—ask follow-up questions to clarify the other person's intent.

- Even if you cannot speak the native language, you can laugh with them, smile, touch their arm, and play with the children. You can communicate interest in the people in many different ways. Don't just hang back and keep to yourself. Greet everyone you meet. Let God's love flow through you. Don't let the language barrier win.
- **Bring pictures** of your family, your relatives, and your home. People love to learn about you and your family. It is also a good way to open doors—even without knowing the language.

B. Culture

Culture might be described as the collective history and experience of a people group, which leads to certain customs, behaviors, and expectations. We come from a very different set of experiences and, therefore, we have a very different culture.

Cultural differences are not always readily apparent, so we should constantly be aware of the potential for cultural differences, and the possibility that such differences might cause misperceptions and misunderstandings.

Example: The project director in Nicaragua told us that the grammar school could be constructed for \$10,000. After \$10,000 had been spent, the director informed us that the school was “finished.” When we arrived to view the “finished” school, we discovered that the school had dirt floors, no ceiling, no electric lights, and no doors. In our culture, a “finished” school would have floors, ceilings, lights, and doors. In Nicaragua, however, many schools do not have such amenities. “Finished” meant something different in the local culture—which led to a misunderstanding.

Example: A local construction worker complained to an American short-term team member that he had not been paid for several weeks. The American's first reaction was to think that the worker had been mistreated. However, it was customary in the local community for workers to labor on the promise of being paid some time in the future, which could be months from the time they started. The worker was not being mistreated; there was a difference in culture (and, trust me, management-labor disputes arise in every culture!).

C. Context

Going to another country and working with a project for two weeks, or even a few months, creates a problem of context. For a variety of reasons, in any given situation, you may not have all of the information you would need to fully understand the situation and reach accurate conclusions. For example, you don't know what happened before you arrived, and you don't know what is going to happen after you leave. Moreover, when you are speaking with someone, you may only be hearing their side of a story, or their perception of something. During a short-term trip, you will be missing a lot of information, and this information might be necessary to have an accurate understanding of a particular situation.

Example: A short-term team brought tools to a project site and donated them to the project. However, the project director promptly took the tools to his house, rather than leaving them at the construction site. Some team members speculated that the director was taking the tools for his own personal use. In fact, the director was planning to fire his contractor and bring in a new crew of construction workers in the immediate future. He was afraid that if he left the tools at the project site, they would be stolen. The short-term team members were lacking this information, because they lacked the context for their observation—and they arrived at an erroneous conclusion as a result.

IV. Your Attitude and Your Response

You can choose how you will react to language barriers, cultural differences, and problems of context. Adopting the following approach will help you respond appropriately in a variety of situations, even when there are language, cultural, and contextual forces at work of which you are unaware.

Your Attitude: Do not approach the other culture with suspicion, fear and prejudice. Instead, approach each situation with:

- Acceptance
- Openness
- Trust

Your Response: When working in a cross-cultural setting, don't respond to situations by being critical or judgmental. Instead:

- Observe
- Listen
- Inquire

Be careful not to be a bad testimony ... the host leaders or missionaries will have to answer for your actions after you leave. Don't leave them with a difficult situation.

ARMS OF LOVE NICARAGUA MISSIONS GUIDE

Let's focus on the example previously given, where the project director in Nicaragua told us that the school could be "finished" for \$10,000. After \$10,000 had been spent, the school still had dirt floors, no ceiling, no electric lights, and no doors.

If you were to approach this situation with suspicion, fear, or prejudice, you could easily conclude that the director had been dishonest and intentionally deceived you. It wouldn't be the first time someone intentionally gave a low budget in order to get initial funding for a project, on the hope that once the first moneys were spent, the donor would feel obligated to give the additional funds required to complete the work. Most likely, you would decide not to work with him again.



But now approach the same situation with an attitude of openness, acceptance, and trust. With this attitude, you would not jump to the conclusion that the director had been deceptive; you would look for an alternative explanation, because you trust him. So you would observe, listen, and inquire. By observing other schools in Nicaragua and by inquiring of the director and of others in the community, you would discover that other schools in Nicaragua also lack such amenities. The director, wanting to be frugal with donated funds, built the school to the minimum standard acceptable in Nicaragua. The failure to define "finished" led to a misunderstanding. As a result of this experience, with future phases of

construction, the features of the "finished" building were more carefully defined at the time of funding to prevent further misunderstandings.

So in this situation, the word "finished" meant something different to the director than it meant to you. Your attitude and your response to that cross-cultural misunderstanding had the potential to either destroy or strengthen that relationship.

Inquiry involves asking questions of the nationals, or of your short-term team liaison, during your trip. But to whatever extent possible, prepare for such issues before the trip as well. Develop an inquisitive mind for the history, customs, religion, culture, and politics of the country you will be visiting, and anything else that interests you. The more you learn, the better equipped you will be to recognize and work through cross-cultural differences.

Of course, every project encounters difficulties, and a situation may arise that should be brought to the attention of leadership. If you are genuinely concerned about something you have heard or observed, share it with your team leader. The team leader will inform the local team liaison or other person directing the project and/or conduct appropriate inquiries. If a genuine problem exists, e.g., with the treatment of the children by some staff member, appropriate action will be taken. But realize that this will be the exception, rather than the rule.

V. Specifics of Latin American Culture

Personal space - People will stand much closer to you when they interact with you and when they speak with you—as little as eight inches! People are not being rude if they get very close to you, or even bump into you; they just have a different sense of personal space. People are also accustomed to living in much closer quarters than we are used to.

Concept of punctuality - In Latin culture, people are usually not precise with time. If an event starts at 9:00 a.m., many people will arrive 30 or 60 minutes later, and people of status may tend to arrive later than others. They are not being rude; they just have a different concept of time, and are not as hung up about schedules as Americans are.

Food is very important - Don't turn down an offer of food. If someone offers you food, please take it, and eat it. It is an expression of offering a part of oneself, an offering of an intimate relationship. If someone has made a meal for you, they have done it with much love, time, and care. They may have spent hours preparing the meal, to honor you, to give you something just from them. It's not just "hey, are you hungry."

Facial expressions - If you are offered food, for example, this may be all they have. They are offering it to you to honor you. Don't reject it or make a face.

Don't point - Pointing is considered rude in Latin American culture.

North Americans tend to be loud - We talk and laugh much more loudly than they do. They perceive this as obnoxious. Tone it down.

Greetings - Latins may greet you with a cheek-to-cheek kiss. This is typically between women. If you do it, it's really more of a kissing the air.

Friendships - North Americans tend to be very free about having male-female friends. In the Latin culture, if you are a guy and a girl, and you are together, additional assumptions are made. Don't walk around as a guy and a girl, or spend a lot of time by yourselves or together, because this will send the wrong message. Moreover, team members should not spend any significant time, one-on-one, with members of the opposite sex in the host country, as this will send a message of romantic interest.

Doors – Don't slam doors, either in homes or cars.