

MISSION TRIPS

FOR FIRST TIMERS



EQUIPPING WORLD-CHANGING DISCIPLES [UMCdiscipleship.org](https://umcdiscipleship.org)



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church



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This pamphlet was produced by Young People's Ministries.

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This resource is made possible by your generous support of The World Service Fund of The United Methodist Church, individual giving, and through the sale of books, magazines, and other products.



INTRODUCTION

So it's your first time leading a youth mission trip? Well, congratulations! And prayers! Organizing and leading a mission trip can be daunting, can test your ability to provide meaningful programs for your young people while maintaining a healthy pastoral relationship with them, and can cost a lot of mula. But these experiences can also help orient your youth ministry around some deep spiritual practices of serving others, seeing God's grace where it is already at work in the world, and putting our Christian faith into action.

Below, we hope you'll find some information, questions for consideration, and some tips and tricks to help you make the most of your missional adventure!



SHOULD WE GO?

One of the first questions we encourage you to ask is: ***Is a mission trip the best way for our youth to serve God by serving others?*** Many youth teams have gone on mission trips for years, many to the same mission organization. But some churches are finding creative ways to be in mission and service with others around the world without spending so much on travel costs. Some are working locally to support United Methodist missionaries. Others are creating outreach and micro-grant programs with international students at nearby colleges. Still others are transitioning from annual visits to local mission sites, to ongoing financial and prayer support of the people there. Going is great, but the first question to ask might just be, what is the best way we could work with others around the globe to share Jesus' mercy and transformation?



WITH WHOM COULD WE PARTNER?

When it is clear that loading up the vans for a mission trip is your best option for being in mission and service, it's important to think about whom you'll connect with for the community relations, accommodations, work, faith exploration and more.

For some groups, a DIY trip works—particularly if your team has staff that can dedicate planning time to making arrangements. For others, serving with an existing mission organization makes the most sense, so all the youth workers' time can be spent building relationships with their youth. Either way, careful discernment about how you can bring your team to a particular part of the world in a healthy and holy way is a must.

A great place to start this discernment is umyouthmissions.org. This site collects information on United Methodist-related mission destinations available to young people and presents the information in a user-friendly database. You can find the best destination for your group based on location, type of work, cost, amenities offered, and more. Check it out to find the right mission partner for your team!



HOW ARE WE GOING TO FUND THIS TRIP?

With a mission partner organization chosen, now it's time to think about resources for your trip. Most congregations are able to support youth mission teams with some combination of the following: budgeted mission dollars, individual team member contributions, and group fundraising efforts. Plan to make use of all three streams of funding. This might mean that you need to plan ahead to be included in the budgeting process of your church, or get to know the leadership/committees that make those decisions.

Of course, the traditional fundraising efforts of Superbowl Sub Sales, Rake N' Runs, and other group-led events are great for engaging both the mission trip participants and their friends and family in supporting this ministry. Just be sure your “tried and true” fundraisers haven't turned into “tired and dull” events only supported begrudgingly. Get online, call another youth worker for input, and get creative about the ideas you are using so that everyone is excited about this trip—supporters and team members alike.

Another emerging option for maximizing fundraising from both the group and for individual team members is the new **revgo.org**. This is a United Methodist sponsored crowdfunding site that allows mission teams to create donation pages for each of their team members, to later blog and post pictures about their trip, and to engage all their social networks in supporting their mission experience. Don't be afraid to jump into the new funding tools that the internet has made possible!



WHAT OUTCOMES DO WE WANT FOR OUR TRIP?

Another important question to guide your first time leading a mission trip is the end game. After your trip, how do you envision lives changed, communities loved, God's mercy made real, and faith inspired?

And be sure that these are goals worthy of the depth and complication offered in the Bible! Is your goal to share the light of Christ? Be sure to watch for the ways that God's light is already shining in the city you are serving. Is your goal for the lives of homeowners in Appalachia to be transformed? Take time to recognize the ways your team members' lives are being transformed even more than the houses you fix or faith stories you share.

Focused mission goals can help our outreach be particularly effective, but be on the lookout for how they may also cause your team to miss out on the serendipitous grace that God offers to us when we go out!



SO NOW, ARE WE READY?

Once you've asked all these questions, have taken time to pray and discuss with your team, and think you are ready to hit the road, take another minute to review the process. After you've thought about your end goals, revisit the questions about whether going somewhere is the best way to accomplish that. When you think about fundraising to get to a mission trip, take a minute to think about how you could raise funds beyond your minimum travel costs to benefit your chosen mission partner.

In the end, Christians are sent people. In Mark 16, after the resurrection, the disciples are told that Jesus is not here, that he is out there, in the world, waiting for us to come join him in sharing his good news. Mission trips are a great way to develop relationships with youth and communities “out there” and through those relationships to do some of the good work that testifies to God’s kin-dom coming on Earth. If we can plan trips that live into the depth of this story then God’s blessing can be made known in all the variety of ways that we go.



TOP TEN DETAILS EVERY MISSION SITE DIRECTOR HOPES YOU ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO:

1. Every site has different forms and procedures. Please be sure to follow those of the place you are partnering with. And if it's a good process for your team, then go back often! If not, keep looking for the partner with the registration process that fits best with your needs.
2. Don't complain about gathering tools! It's a *work* mission, so putting some effort into bringing the tools that you can will better prepare your team for whatever work arises.
3. Plan to be present for all events and meals planned by your partner organization. Disappearing on a dinner because you just wanted to give your group a treat may leave uneaten food and will be rude to volunteers who may have come to help provide your team nourishment.
4. Share about your trip on social media, and tag your partner often! Most mission sites could use the attention, and your group makes for really good-looking pictures and blog posts about how great your experience has been.
5. Strike a balance between offering an affordable trip and being realistic about the true cost of heading out into mission and service. This will involve picking a partner whose costs are accessible, having good fundraising tactics, and not adding a lot of extra costs for recreational adventures.
6. Register for your summer trip by December 1 of the previous year. This might not be required by your mission partner organization, but will certainly help you and your team be prepared once summer finally rolls around. Most sites have some process for perfecting team numbers during the school year before your trip, so just check with them to be sure that you are following those.
7. Plan a DIY trip if you have leadership/staff with the time to both plan and lead the experience, while still growing

your relationship with your youth. Sometimes it's hard to be both the trip organizer and the relational pastor at the same time.

8. Remember, some service areas have finite resources for housing or project coordination, so sometimes a lot of DIY-seeking groups complicate the ongoing work there. Be attentive to that!
9. Always build time into your trip to reflect upon the experience daily through Bible study, prayerful discussions, and more. Sometimes visiting speakers or field trips around your service area also help expand your team's faith-filled understandings of why we do this service work as followers of Jesus.
10. Help your team remember that minor discomforts like bad coffee or thin bunk bed mattresses pale in comparison to the good work and relationships you will build during your week of service. If we keep the main thing the main thing, then we'll all have a better week!



TOP FIVE FIRST-TIME MISSION TRIP MINISTRY HACKS TO REMEMBER:

1. **FIND** your mission partner organization at umyouthmissions.org.
2. **FUND** your trip at revgo.org.
3. **THANK YOUR SUPPORTERS** with lots of pictures, blog posts, thank you notes, in-person feedback moments and more!
4. **BE OVERPREPARED** with good counselors, sets of tools, plans for affordable fun, and conversation starters for spiritual reflection.
5. **KEEP FOCUSED** on scriptures like Micah 6:8 that orient our work around God's hopes for the world—*“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*