

A Framework for Developing Cross-cultural Immersion Experiences

“Surely I know the plans I have for you”, says the Lord, “to give you a

**future
with
hope.”**

Jeremiah 29:11

A cross-cultural immersion trip is more like a pilgrimage than a mission trip. That is to say, a trip with spiritual significance. It is entering another culture through our shared Christian faith for the purpose of knowing God more fully. It is joining new friends in their ministry, exchanging ideas, questions and prayers. Finally, it is reaching out to become partners in the Gospel through our shared baptismal call to work for peace and justice in the world.

Take off your shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. We enter with care so we don't find ourselves treading on someone's dreams. May we always remember that God has been there before our arrival.

Before you travel ask yourself...

What are your expectations? Check all that apply.

- New sights, sounds, tastes, touches and odors
- God's people living in extreme poverty
- Stories from new people
- Deal with many emotions
- Give money to people to solve their problems
- Maintain phone & email contact with people at home
- Everyone on the trip has the same expectations
- Everyone at home will want to hear my stories
- Similar to trips I have had in the past
- Be changed by the experience
- No real expectations
- What else?

Practices That Matter:

Language...

- Say “Developing World” not “Third World “
- Remember Central and South Americans are also “Americans”
- Notice volume and frequency. U.S. citizens often talk louder, interrupt or dominate conversations without even realizing it!

Use a Side-by-Side Posture...

- There is a big difference between “helping poor people” and sharing gifts, learning together, partnering, etc.
- Thinking about “them vs. us” is less helpful than “we”
- Learning to pronounce names correctly shows respect
- Sharing power by making decisions together builds real relationships

Check Assumptions...

- IQ is not related to economic status
- Low economic status does not equal unhappiness or *visa versa*
- Everyone has something to give and something to receive

Be careful not to romanticize poverty and imagine that people don't know what they are missing! Our world is very connected and people know when they are hungry or can't access health care.

Becoming culturally conscious includes (but is not limited to...)



Developing Awareness

- Admitting personal biases, stereotypes, and prejudices
- Becoming aware of cultural norms, attitudes, and beliefs
- Valuing diversity
- Being willing to extend oneself psychologically and physically
- Recognizing comfort level in different situations

Acquiring Knowledge

- Worshipping in different languages by visiting congregations other than your own
- Knowing how your culture is viewed by others
- Reading about other cultures, especially your destination
- Watching movies and documentaries about other cultures
- Attending cultural events and festivals

Developing and Maintaining Cross-Cultural Skills

- Making friends with people of different cultures
- Establishing diverse professional and working relationships
- Learning another language
- Learning verbal and nonverbal cues of other cultures
- Becoming more comfortable in cross-cultural situations
- Assessing what works and what does not
- Assessing how the beliefs and behaviors of the cultural group affect the community or the family
- Learning to negotiate between the person's beliefs and practices and the culture of your origin
- Being more flexible
- Attending continuing education seminars and workshops
- Learning to develop culturally relevant and appropriate programs, materials, and activities
- Ongoing evaluation of personal feelings and reactions
- Overcoming fears, personal biases, stereotypes, and prejudices