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2nd Period

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"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Version, Matthew 4:19). In this verse, Jesus sends out a challenge for all generations to go and stand up for their faith. He asks Christians to delve into the depths of the world and proudly proclaim that he is the one true God. Missions trips offer youth the opportunity to go and fulfill the Great Commission to the farthest regions of the earth. These trips not only provide the experience of a lifetime to participants, but they also have the ability to impact their lives forever. Mission trips are an essential element in the spiritual formation of youth, and when planned and executed correctly they have the ability to be life changing to teenagers who are at a vital point in their lives.

In order to understand the influence of mission trips, it is first necessary to understand what they are and how they developed. The phrase "mission trips" is an abbreviated name for what was once defined as a short-term mission. A short-term mission, or missions trip, is the mobilization of a Christian Missionary for a time period ranging from a day to a full year ("Short-term Mission"). Missions trips are classified as either foreign or domestic. Foreign trips are expeditions taking place somewhere other than the participants' native country, whereas domestic trips are adventures that involve spreading God's love to people in their own country. Goals of mission trips vary based on

what the group is looking to gain from the experience. The most common goal of a missions trip is to open the eyes of youth to the conditions experienced by other people as well as their culture and way of life. Another common goal of a missions trip is to create more of a global awareness for teens. It is not uncommon for teens to become so focussed on their own life that they lose sight of what truly matters such as family, friends and spiritual life (Nored). Mission trips serve as gateways for youth to reconnect to principal values that are forgotten over time. Missions trips are not restricted to specific denominations of the Christian faith. A national survey conducted in 2006 stated that 2.1% of church members from all denominations have been on a missions trip in the past year and 3.6% claimed to have participated in missions as teens and young adults ("Short-term Mission"). Short-term missions has been an essential part of the lives of Christian youth for decades and will continue to be because of the lasting results conveyed through youth who participate.

Youth mission trips have become an integral part of the Christian faith. The idea of sending youth on mission trips has been around since Jesus walked the earth. When he told his disciples to go to the world proudly proclaiming his name, he was essentially sending them out to be missionaries (Nored). In the 50's there was a sudden growth in Christian missions work due to the start of Operation Mobilization which allowed young people to take charge in spreading the gospel. The organization mobilized them in foreign countries over the summer and equipped them with the tools necessary to be successful short-term missionaries. This sparked a revolution, and by 1958 there were 43,000 Christian missionaries in the world ("Short-term Mission"). Over the next decade the Iron

Curtain caused a halt in the growth of missions work because the mission field in Europe was off limits due to political issues of the time. However, just because the groups stopped growing didn't mean that they would not keep already formed groups active. Most of them continued to spread the word of God despite the tribulations presented by the Iron Curtain ("Short-term Mission"). Youth With a Mission was started in the 60's to reinforce the idea that young people could be effective missionaries. This group helped restore what had been a slowly growing form of serving God, to being a rapidly growing life changing experience for teens all over the world ("Short-term Mission"). These groups revolutionized the way youth take an active role in Christian missions by allowing young people to take charge and change the world.

The location of a mission trip can be a vital indicator to its success and effect on the lives of participants. Missions work can be done anywhere. Some of the more common mission fields are: Africa, North and South America, Asia, and Europe. These are areas that many groups choose go to because of their rich culture and opportunities to spread the gospel. Mexico is the most common mission trip destination, with 50% of teams choosing to make it their destination (Lusk). A common misconception is that you must go abroad to have a successful missions trip, but there are many mission opportunities in the United States that can provide groups with remarkable and life changing experiences (Schapiro). Dick McClain, President and CEO of The Mission Society, puts it this way:

Acts 1:8 calls us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth while not neglecting 'Jerusalem,' our mission field at home. Whether you live in Louisville, Kentucky, or Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, it is incumbent on Christian

disciples to identify and then reach out to those who have had the least exposure to the gospel. The least-reached people may very well be your neighbor (Schapiro).

In this statement he says that missions trips should be less about sights and sounds, and more about growing the Kingdom regardless of where you are. The location, along with many other factors, is an integral component in determining the success and impact of a mission trip.

One of the most important components of a successful missions trip is being well organized and well prepared. There are two ways groups must be organized and prepared: physically and emotionally. The physical organization and preparation consists of making sure that the group has everything they need to live comfortably wherever they choose to visit and that they have what they need to get there. Many details that must be sorted out prior to leaving for the trip are: passports, luggage, cost, insurance and materials (BCMD). Some other forms of physical preparation can be making sure that the mission team is trained. Not only should groups participate in classroom training and activities but it is helpful to have them do a local mission trip to prepare them for the social skills that will be needed on the actual trip (BCMD). If traveling abroad it may be helpful to have groups read or watch videos to become familiar with the culture and people (Lusk). Though the physical side of preparing may seem daunting, the emotional preparation may seem just as trying. Fulfilling the emotional needs of teams entering the mission field often consist of conversating over what will be expected of them in the field. They need to be exposed to the culture and people beforehand so they develop a sensitivity and awareness

to the culture that will allow them to communicate effectively (BCMD). Doing personal Bible studies with the group will also provide a means to get the entire group on the same page about sharing the gospel. The Bible studies will allow them to grow closer as a group which will make working together easier, once they are in the field (BCMD). Many short-term mission participants receive minimal or even no cross-cultural training. Chuck Gailey and Howard Culbertson, co-authors of the *Discovering Missions* textbook, state that “Many do not speak the heart language of the people in the area where they go. Most participants are on-site for less than two weeks. Because of these and other issues, some have wondered how it is possible that short-termers can be of any lasting benefit for the world mission enterprise” (Gaily). This statement shows that most groups that are not physically and emotionally prepared have been proven ineffective in the missions field. Physical and emotional preparation will eliminate many obstacles that would cause a missions team to be unsuccessful. Taking these precautions will allow youth groups to be impacted through the trips as well as have a life changing experience.

Though there are many important segments that go into planning and executing a mission trip, one of the most crucial is the picking of the team. When deciding who will serve on the team for the trip the standards must be set high to assure a good experience for all team members (BCMD). If all members are cohesive they are less likely to be distracted, and will have a better chance at having their lives altered by the trip. Team members must be expected to attend all informational and training meetings prior to leaving for the journey so they will be prepared for the journey that lies ahead. They must also be held accountable for growing closer to God personally, without the guidance of the

other members of the group (BCMD). Some groups require a personal interview as well as recommendation letters and an application to go on trips, as a way to gain a personal view of the possible teammates (Barnes). These requirements also show the group leaders that the young adult is mature, and ready to put forth the effort and will be devoted to the trip. One of the reasons that youth missions is unsuccessful is because of the process by which the team is chosen. If there is a set number that must go on the trip there will end up being people who slide in by default (BCMD). The team members that are allowed to go because someone had to fill the slot are often the participants that distract the dedicated team members who are looking for a life changing experience (Barnes). The team choosing process has the ability to make or break the missions trip for everyone. A smooth running team will provide lasting relationships among each other and will create bonds that will last a lifetime(*Simply Youth Ministry*). Having the perfect cohesion and effort throughout the team will allow teenagers to experience the culture and outcomes made possible by a successful trip.

One possible outcome of a youth missions trip is the way in which the participants will impact their community after they return. Many unsuccessful mission teams go on the trip, then come home and do absolutely nothing. This is why some teen mission experiences do not result in a true change in the participants. They are only living the Christian life for the duration of the trip and they return and their routine goes back to normal. Not only will a successful trip ensure that proper planning and execution occur, but it will also provide the means for teens to reach out to their community, share their story, and impact lives at home (BCMD). Many groups find it helpful to hold a service when they

return and allow participants to thank the congregation while sharing their story. This allows people to hold them accountable for not falling back into old habits (Goins). Many teams find themselves rejuvenated when they come home from a trip so in turn they find ways to give back locally. Many people do things such starting local missions outreach programs. Not everyone gives in the same fashion; some will simply be more involved at church or in the community. One teen describes her post-mission experience in stating, "I've messed up a lot along the way, but now everything is starting to change. Over the past couple of months I've started going to church and now I'm an active part of my youth group,"(Riley). This is a first hand account of how missions changes the lives of teens and how the positive results of the trips can greatly impact the community.

Going on mission trips has the ability to open the eyes of youth and change their perspective on life in ways that can determine the course of their career and future. Choosing to participate in a missions trip gives youth the opportunity to gain a global perspective and realize what God's calling for lives may be (Barnes). Some people go on a missions trip and realize that missions work is what they want to dedicate their lives to. While speaking about a missions camp he attended in July of 2008, Kris-Ann states,

"At the camp I learnt about cross-cultural missions and how much God is depending on me to take the precious Gospel to His people across the globe... Now I can boldly stand and declare to the world that I fit in; I belong to missions! My future looks bright I can truly say I have been called to greatness," (Ann).

Since deciding to go into full-time ministry he has focused his work on spreading the

gospel to Guatemala and Australia. This is just one of the many accounts of people who have been on short-term trips and have realized their life calling as a career missionary (Gaily). Short-term missions have the ability to impact the futures and career decisions of the people who participate in them.

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## Outline

Thesis: Mission trips are an essential element in the spiritual formation of youth, and when planned and executed correctly they have the ability to be life changing to teenagers who are at a vital point in their lives.

### I. Youth Missions

#### A. General Info

1. Goals
2. People

#### B. Start of Missions

1. Origin
2. When they started
3. Why they started
4. First organizations

#### C. Where

1. Common missions fields
2. Foreign and Domestic

### II. Successful Missions

#### A. Organization

1. Physical

- a. Passports
      - b. Luggage
      - c. Logistics
    - 2. Emotional
      - a. Expectations
      - b. What will be asked of team
  - B. Team Members
    - 1. Cohesion
    - 2. Requirements
      - a. Understood
      - b. Met
    - 3. Carefully Chosen
    - 4. Common goals for trip
    - 5. Communication
    - 6. Behavioral Standards
- III. Outcomes of Successful Trips
- A. Bring back to community
    - 1. Tell of experience
    - 2. Organize more trips
    - 3. Get others involved
      - a. In church
      - b. In trips
  - B. Realize greater purpose
    - 1. Possible Careers
      - a. Missionary
      - b. Church Missions Leader
    - 2. Bring others to God
      - a. While home
      - b. Bring missions field with them
  - C. Lifestyle Change
    - 1. Misguidance corrected
      - a. Realization of bad choices
      - b. Drops old habits
    - 2. Positive life choices
      - a. New goals in life
      - b. Correction of past mistakes
    - 3. New understanding of Christianity
      - a. Actual change
      - b. Appreciation
        - (1) Life
        - (2) Freedoms
    - 4. Set example for teens
      - a. Converts others

- b. Becomes leader and advocate
  - (1) Community
  - (2) Church
  - (3) School