



A GATHERING PLACE
FOR SHORT-TERM MISSION ARTICLES,
RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Cultivating a heart of missions with your students through COVID-19

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The current pandemic has put a halt to a lot of youth missions trips this summer. This has likely disrupted not only travel plans, but whatever momentum youth pastors' have gained in building a heart of missions in their students. I pray this isn't the case, but as we hopefully are able to resume our plans later this year and especially as we plan for next summer, I'd like to share some of the insights I learned as a youth leader for 12 years at a church in Vancouver, Washington.

If you'd like to hear more after reading, join me and a panel of leaders in the area of missions for the [SOE Webinar on June 9 at 11am PST – Leveraging Youth Mission Trips for Long-Term Spiritual Growth.](#)

Like I said, I served at the same church, Laurelwood Baptist, for 12 years. I started as their intern, and when the youth pastor I was working with stepped down, I became the interim and then the new youth pastor. Thankfully, Laurelwood already had a strong history and culture of missions well before I arrived and continues to this day, now three years since I passed the baton to the next youth pastor.

Prior to Laurelwood, I'd been involved with several mission trips. As a high school student, our youth group helped with a Vacation Bible School a few hours away from my home church. In college, my basketball team travelled to Australia and Mexico to run clinics and share the gospel. And my wife, Anna, and I were on a small team serving at a missionary school during an annual conference for the school staff and their families in Ivory Coast, West Africa.

In my three years at Laurelwood as the intern and interim, I wasn't able to join the teams that went to Mexico to build houses with Amor Ministries. I knew when the baton was passed to me that I needed to continue building this missions momentum. Over the next ten years, I learned a lot and I'd like to share my top ten tips for cultivating a heart of missions in the lives of students.

1. Set your vision

This falls under the "what I should have done from the start" category. Unfortunately, it took me a few years to establish a concrete, communicable vision for our student ministry. It may take time for you to develop this for your ministry, but it is vital. It will likely be an evolving process too. The first step toward this is tip #2.

2. Know yourself, your students and your families

When I became the youth pastor, I knew that building houses wasn't a good fit for me. I also knew that sports-focused mission trips weren't a good fit for our students and their families. It

took time to identify our community strengths, weaknesses and interests and in so doing, I gained more trust and buy in.

3. Connect with a church/ministry on-site

No one knows what God is already doing in a particular paradigm more than those that have been already serving there. Take time to research and find the best partners that already have their finger on the pulse of God's work in their community.

4. Commit for a few years

You will learn a lot from the first trip. Returning to the same paradigm with these lessons in mind will help you be all the more effective the next time. Plus, it keeps the focus of your trip on the relationships you make, more than just the work you may be doing.

5. Leverage local to global and global back to local

Even with a strong history of student missions, I found myself basically starting over. I started by connecting with local ministries. As students showed a desire to engage more, I looked for something stateside that had an added level of commitment - in our case, hurricane Katrina relief. Over time, their needs surpassed our means to meet them.

Next, God led us to serve alongside Compassion International in the Dominican Republic. As we expanded our scope geographically, we focused on helping our team see the world around them with the eyes of Jesus, using their individual gifts, talents and abilities together as a team to share and live out the gospel. This applied to everywhere they went, including their own homes, schools and neighborhoods.

6. Invite parents, siblings, and the rest of your church to be on the team

This is also filed under "what I should have done from the start." As our student mission opportunities expanded, family members as well as church members from every generation were excited to join future teams. Not only did this allow us to be able to serve and connect with a broader community on site, it also helped our church to grow intergenerationally at home.

7. Build the right team

Utilizing an application process for our team members allowed us to evaluate their readiness, availability, their potential contribution as a team member and the potential personal impact. I also learned that I wasn't necessarily the best one to lead. Of the eight teams that I planned, I only led one of them on-site. The other trips were led by men and women more familiar with our locations and their culture and who were more gifted and capable of helping our team be most effective.

8. Prepare your team

Using the Next Mile Training in the six to twelve months leading up to our trip was invaluable to help us bond and learn how to work together. Another helpful resource is the Student ConneXion conference. This two-day mission conference for middle and high school students includes keynote speakers, workshops and exhibitors focused on cultivating a heart for missions at home and around the world.

9. You're NOT the expert

Prior to our first trip to the Dominican Republic, our trip leader pulled me aside. He told me throw out the idea that I had some new information that would help make their church better. In fact, they were doing just fine and in many ways they were more effective than our church. Not only was he right, but it allowed me to learn so much that I would bring back to our own ministries.

10. Report and Debrief

Mission experiences are a lot to process. The culture shock, the reverse culture shock and the expansion of our understanding of God's work in the world can be overwhelming. Scheduling several occasions over the next few months to process together can really help solidify what God is teaching each team member. And having a time to share these experiences and lessons with your church family is the perfect time to invite others to join the next mission opportunity.

I know there's still so much more for me to learn. What would you add? I do hope you'll join us for the SOE Webinar so we can learn more from each other too!