



Pathways

**To Opportunities of Service, Learning,
Fellowship, and Encouragement**

MNA ShortTerm exists to mobilize and equip churches of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) by communicating short-term ministry opportunities that exist within churches, mission churches, and other PCA ministries throughout the United States and Canada. Churches and individuals looking for opportunities of service will find more than a destination.

Because God's presence exists in every community through fellow image bearers, we seek to promote opportunities as **collaborative relationships**. This means that rather than coming as people who have all of the answers and resources, we may enter a cross-cultural community as equals, seeking to learn, fellowship, and provide encouragement, along with whatever physical acts of service are requested.

Our prayer is that your participation would become a pathway to learning, long-term partnerships, and greater ministry participation at home.

While certainly not exhaustive, here are **five key factors** to consider that will help you begin a path of service, learning, fellowship, and encouragement.

1 SEMPER GUMBY (BE ALWAYS FLEXIBLE)

Changes are inevitable, no matter how well we plan. Yet as people who cherish comfort and control we don't always respond well to unforeseen events.

Short-term trips will almost certainly not turn out exactly as planned. That's why we encourage participants to embrace an attitude of Semper Gumby, Being "Always Flexible." For people too young to understand the reference, Gumby is a flexible action figure based on a popular 1960's cartoon. We adapted our term from the United States Marines, Semper Fi, which means "Always Faithful." This motto helps direct the focus of their mission and gives confidence in the face of uncertainty. It is a fitting reminder as we consider that our battle is spiritual and that humility is foundational to flexibility.

While we can't avoid every unexpected event we can manage our responses. It's important to remind ourselves that our ultimate goal is "people" not "projects" and we are here to serve the ministry not ourselves. [Also, What we consider unexpected might be something God has planned in order to serve a greater purpose.](#) **Semper Gumby Ya'll.**






2 BE A LEARNER

The **humility** that empowers flexibility should also inform the awareness that when you participate with a short-term ministry you should enter as a **learner**.

It's helpful to consider our choice of words because they tend to inform our attitudes and actions. You are not "missionaries" and you are not serving "projects." When you consider this kind of language you may inadvertently and inappropriately put yourself in a position of power, authority, and completeness, coming across as the "put together people" sent to help "those poor, broken people." The reality is that you are also broken, sinful, and in daily need of Jesus to make you whole. Likewise, with the wrong attitude you might unintentionally engage in acts of service that make you appear as superheroes flying in to save the day, set things right, then flying out again.

When you enter a community as a learner you acknowledge you are entering upon the **invitation** and under the **authority** of the church or ministry you are serving. These are the missionaries that you are here to support. They have given their lives to serve this community and you have much to learn from them. Besides, your participation in one week of service will not eliminate physical poverty. As C. S. Lewis once wrote, "A person whose hands are full of parcels cannot receive a gift." **When you participate as a learner you will have more to take away than mere photographs and memories.**



3 PURSUE LONG-TERM IMPACT

We invest a great deal of money to send and support missionaries overseas yet churches planted in the United States, in communities of physical poverty, receive support for a much shorter period of time. That's because we tend to impose the same expectations and timelines that we impose on church plants in more affluence communities. This is an unrealistic expectation because churches in communities of physical poverty often lack the resources for a church to become self-sustaining within a few years. Likewise, these churches tend to face unique challenges which **require long-term encouragement, financial support, and the supplemental service that short-term ministry provides.**

Entering a community with the attitude of a learner often leads to long-term engagement because participants see and engage with the principles of poverty alleviation in ways that don't occur when they view participation as a Disney-type destination trip, focused primarily on tasks and "drive by mercy."

Pursuing long-term impact also faithfully stewards resources turning participants into partners, as they **invest in the community and care for people through long-term relationships.**



4

LET SHORT-TERM TRIPS BE A CATALYST

Missiologists refer to the gap in our service at home and service on short-term ministry trips as a “hole in our service.” Is this true of your church? **Do you have a hole in your service?** There are many reasons why we might fail to meet the needs of people in our church and in our community. First, we may not think we have the time. Secondly, we might not know where to begin. Finally, we may not consider ourselves capable for the task.

When our participation with short-term ministry shifts from being a destination event to a service learning opportunity, great things can happen. Our participation with short-term ministry can become a catalyst for long-term ministry at home.

Before you serve with one of MNA ShortTerm’s ministry partners it might be helpful to ask a few questions:

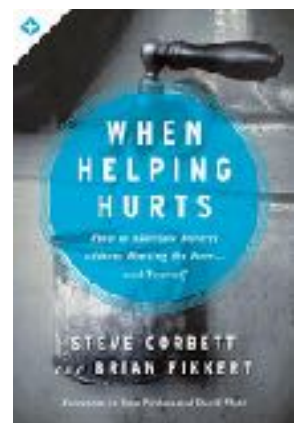
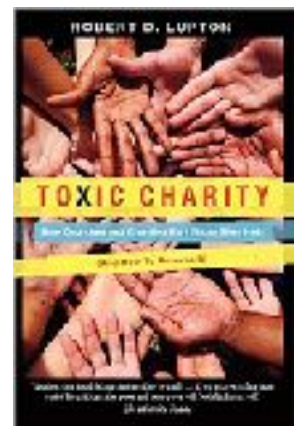
- What can we do *here* (at home)?
- How might focused prayer open the doors to local service?
- How might what we do *there* help us serve *here*?
- How might our relationships with church leaders and community members there better equip us serve *here*?

5 BE PREPARED

There are a number of very helpful resources to aid you in thinking through short-term ministry participation and partnerships. *Toxic Charity* and *When Helping Hurts* are two very helpful books to consider as you prepare your church for service, whether it's in another state or in your backyard. For more listings check out our *Resource* page at mnashortterm.org.

Here are a few highlights from the book, *Toxic Charity*.

1. Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.
2. Limit one-way giving to emergency situations
3. Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending, and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements.
4. Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.
5. Listen closely to those who seek to help, especially to what is not being said-unspeakable feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.
6. Above all, do no harm.





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