

Congregational Support Teams for Mission Team Participants

Background: Mission trips are often transformational for participants. Those who make these trips will see God at work in new and difficult places, experience the hospitality and observe the faith of brothers and sisters in Christ who have very little materially, as well as the challenges and the blessings of living in community with other Christians. Often, after the initial report of the participant to the congregation, little more happens. Participants can feel isolated and congregations miss an opportunity for growth. This plan is an attempt to help both participants and their congregations. It is in its formative stages, so we welcome news of what worked and didn't work in your congregation, as well as suggestions to enhance the impact of "support teams."

Goals of "Support Teams":

- ❖ To better support mission team participants by helping them integrate their experiences on mission trips into their "normal" lives after returning.
- ❖ To intentionally pray and make plans for ways in which the mission experience can aid in the spiritual development of all the members of participating churches.

Barriers to accomplishing these goals:

- ❖ Push and pull; other priorities competing for time and energy of participant and congregation.
- ❖ Lack of interface among Christian Education, worship, and on-going mission programs within churches.

"CONGREGATIONAL SUPPORT TEAM" (an evolving description)

- ❖ A small group would be created and include the mission team participant, the pastor, and 2-4 others. The others might include someone the participant really wants as part of his/her group (spouse, friend, mentor), someone who might be a good participant in the future or has been in the past; people with some specific responsibilities in the church (examples: members of missions committee, CE and/or worship committees; Presbyterian Women); someone with spiritual maturity who would provide good insights & be especially supportive of participant.
- ❖ The group would study some of the same materials as the participant is in preparation for the trip.
- ❖ Together members of the "Support Team" would put together a list of what might be done in the church before, during, and after the trip (brainstorm).
- ❖ Then they would make plans for what to do in congregation before the trip to connect the members with the experience.
- ❖ Also discuss what are the transformative elements of a mission trip experience and how they might be able to replicate or find other ways to create some of them within the church. (Examples: Change of environment; hands-on working experience (instead of answering phones, administrative work etc.); working in community on a common project; closeness of community; cultural plunge.)
- ❖ Members would covenant to pray for their participant (and involve larger church in this as well).
- ❖ Before the participant leaves, they will set meeting date for immediately after their participant returns home with the purpose of making some decisions about what to implement from their list of ideas made before trip.