



EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL MISSION TRIPS

A GUIDE FOR CONGREGATIONS



PURPOSE

LCMS International Mission organizes its work around these pillars: spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches and show mercy. The people of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) work together to send missionaries, support projects and cooperate with other Lutherans.

“Why should my congregation consider sending an international mission team?”

Sending an international mission team benefits the people you will be serving:

- All team trips support the strategic priorities of LCMS mission work in that field and region: spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches and show mercy.
- You will encourage the missionaries, spouses, children and nationals serving in that country who all need prayers and encouragement as they minister and share the Good News of Jesus.

You will also notice how it affects each member of the team:

- You will serve others, not as an expert or one with more privilege, but as a child of God and a servant of Christ. It's humbling.
- Your team will experience firsthand what it means to serve in another culture and learn the challenges of communicating the Gospel, and of ministry in that culture.
- Some may return and notice that God is calling them to explore missionary life on a long-term basis.

Your congregation will benefit as well:

- You will learn how God desires all people to be saved and gathers His children in His Church. Hopefully this will motivate your team to engage your congregation more courageously in connecting people to Jesus after you return.
- When you return and share the experience with your congregation, they gain broader perspective of God's Church and His work in the world.
- Your congregation may develop ongoing relationships with the people your team served by responding to their specific needs, supporting them with prayer and sending teams regularly.

“ I think the biggest joy of being a team leader is watching the team learn about and participate in the mission work of our church body in a hands-on way. They come to understand the long-term work of our missionaries and then become advocates for that work when they return home.”

— Brian G., team leader of May 2023 team serving in Peru



OPPORTUNITIES

“What kinds of international mission trips are available?”

Our mission trip opportunities develop from requests from the mission field. You can be sure that everything is well-planned and contributes to the mission work in that area through one of the three pillars that undergird all of our work: spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches and show mercy.

Building from those three priorities, there are many team opportunities to explore. Here are some current and past international mission projects for congregational teams:

- **VBS:** similar to U.S. Vacation Bible School
- **ENGLISH BIBLE CAMP:** like VBS with an English language component
- **CONSTRUCTION:** help fix or construct buildings for ministry purposes – from new builds to storm damage repair
- **MERCY OUTREACH FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ADULTS:** share Bible stories and spend time with adults with disabilities
- **MISSION EDUCATION:** serve alongside missionaries and the local church while learning about the culture and mission specific to that area

- **MISSIONARY KID PROGRAM:** VBS and babysitting missionary kids during a regional missionary event
- **BANNER-MAKING WORKSHOP:** help local members design, create and display church banners
- **KID'S MUSIC CAMP:** a music camp that focuses on making music to praise the Lord

To see the most up-to-date opportunities, visit servenow.lcms.org/short-term

“30% of the participants were not from the local church. The Czech host was very excited to meet new families from the community through this hands-on contact ministry. One of the Czech camp counselors shared: I'm really glad we had the opportunity to meet more kids from our village and now when we see them on the street, we can say hi and invite them.”

– Chelsea I., missionary in the Czech Republic

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

“What do we do? What do you do?”






This chart is a simplified overview of who is responsible for parts of the mission trip. You will get more details as you go through the process.

“Short-term Team” may refer to individuals on your team, the leaders and even your congregation. The leader of your congregation’s team has a distinct relationship with the LCMS.

“LCMS team” refers to the LCMS contact located in St. Louis as well as the missionaries you will serve. The team in St. Louis handles many of the logistics and preparation for the trip so the missionaries on site can focus on the ministry and local connections, but they are in close communication.

“Members feel connected to each other, and the family of God grows stronger through these trips and groups. When we work together, communicate, and serve God’s Kingdom through mission projects and trips a group leader gets to see God’s hand in truly powerful ways. It is always humbling and exciting to see how God is working and to be used by Him to accomplish His purposes.”

– Jacob H., team leader of May 2023 team serving in the Czech Republic

	SHORT-TERM TEAM	LCMS TEAM
TRAVEL 	Arrange and pay for airfare Provide travel documents: passport/visa Arrange ground transportation to/from U.S. airport	Your trip fees cover these items, which we will arrange: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lodging & Meals• In-country ground transportation (in most cases)
RISK 	Assess each team member’s personal risk levels Assess personal health risk with your own doctor Follow guidance of host concerning risks Purchase travel insurance (optional)	Assess and mitigate team risks Provide personal risk assessment resources Provide international evacuation insurance
PROJECT 	Prepare for the project as directed Show flexibility May need to bring some supplies	Plan project to meet existing needs on mission field Provide resources and guidance to prepare team for project Purchase some supplies locally
SPIRITUAL 	Regularly attend worship Pray for people you are serving Incorporate devotions and prayer into all your team does — before, during and after the trip	Pray for you and the people you are serving Provide devotions and church blessing Schedule time for team devotions and worship during the trip
CULTURE 	Engage with provided cultural prep materials Serve with the understanding that you are learners, servants and guests	Provide cultural prep materials Provided training outline includes time for cultural prep at every meeting Host guides team through local cultural customs
SUPPORT 	Gather financial, prayer and logistical support (such as rides to airport, people watching your pets, etc.) Pay for airfare and ground expenses	Offer guidance for support-raising Issue a single invoice that covers all required ground expenses for the whole team



SELECTING YOUR TEAM

How do we know who should go on the team?

The team chosen to embark on the short-term mission will have many roles and responsibilities that can be further developed and supported by the OIM staff.

- The team leader will need to be a good communicator, organized and strong in faith life and practices.
- All team members will take responsibility for different elements of the trip; they will have work to do before and during the trip.

Bringing together the people that will make up your team is an essential task. The team leader and pastor should select and invite people who could work well together and meet the needs of the mission project. Here are some ideas for recruiting:

- Talk to small groups and Bible studies about the trip and what kind of person you're looking for.
- Personally invite those who you think will be best for your team.
- Have an informational meeting where interested people can learn more about the project, the mission conditions and the requirements.
- Consider the demands of the project and who can best fulfill them. The LCMS team will help with this process.
 - Does the project require special talents or expertise?
 - Do they have to be able to lift or carry heavy things or walk long distances?
 - Are there any health issues that might be a concern?
 - What are the physical requirements for travel and the project?

“As a first-time team leader and an inexperienced international traveler, I was anxious about leading our short-term team. My advice to another first-time leader is to use the resources the Synod provides! ... We had a rich and rewarding experience; we had great support from the Synod; we all grew spiritually; and I think most of us would do it all over again!”

– Doug S., team leader of a March 2023 team serving in the Dominican Republic.

Can any age go on a mission trip?

Talk to your LCMS contact about your concerns. While there is no upper age limit, physical and health limitations should be assessed before they commit to the team. Youth ages 14–17 may serve if they are accompanied by adults and their parents have completed notarized paperwork with permissions. Younger children may go if accompanied by a parent/guardian and there's a suitable mission opportunity.

If this piques your interest, reach out to our LCMS team and get a mission conversation started. Visit [servenow.lcms.org/short-term](https://www.servenow.lcms.org/short-term) to choose an opportunity or email mission.teams@lcms.org.



SUPPORT RAISING

How do we get support for this project?

We have some resources to help you find support for your mission trip. Remember that the support you receive isn't just financial. Support-raising is about building a team who will encourage you, volunteer to help you, pray for you and contribute financially if necessary. All short-term volunteers need to raise support, even if they can financially pay for the trip themselves.

Consider the following ways people can support you and be a part of your team without traveling across the globe:

- Financially — They may wish to contribute a little (such as a loose change collection) or a lot (like donors who sponsor you per mile you'll be traveling).
- Spiritually — Ask others to join you in praying for travel, for the people you serve and for God's will to be done.
- Logistically — Some may offer to drive you to and from the airport or create a slideshow after you send them photos.
- Personally — Others may be willing to water your plants or pet sit.

“Our family is so grateful for the opportunity and all of the people who helped us get ready for that time to serve as God's hands and feet. We were blessed by the trip and hope that we are able to go on a similar service opportunity sometime soon.”

— Volunteer January 2023, Cambodia

Many people will want to be part of this mission trip. How can you invite them to be part of the mission story?

- Tell the story of why you're going and what you'll be doing. Your ultimate goal is to tell the story of God's mission. Explain what you will be doing, why you are responding to God's call in this place and how their gift will make an impact. It is important to remember to engage, not entertain, as you share your message.
- Ask others to join you in prayer to our heavenly Father that He would bless your efforts and use you to share His love with people everywhere. Prayer is a powerful tool.
- Think about creative fundraising possibilities that don't compete with other groups. Work with church leadership to see that it's handled in a way that follows their policies and procedures.
- Be clear and transparent. Let them know how much of what they donate is paying for which part of your trip.
- Say thank you as you share the rest of your story when you return.

Remember that going on a trip is not the only way to be involved in spreading the Gospel. Raising support may seem uncomfortable to some, but please remember it is your opportunity to help others be part of God's command to spread His Word. Not everyone can go. Give people the opportunity to respond as God calls them.



NEXT STEPS

“What does the timeline look like from when we first decide to do a mission trip until we get home?”

EXPLORATION PHASE: 9–12 months before you board the plane (this timeline is not rigid)

- Pray about this opportunity and talk to your church’s leaders about plans to send a congregational team.
- Send an inquiry to the Erin Alter, Director, Short-term Mission Teams at LCMS International Mission and hear back within a week.
- You and Erin work out an appropriate trip with dates and location, if not already set. (This is easier to do if you already have one in mind that’s listed in *Serve Now*: servenow.lcms.org/short-term).

APPLICATION PHASE:

- Fill out a team leader application.
- Your congregation’s pastor affirms that he is aware of and supportive of this team forming. Pastor and team leader start assembling team.
- Your team receives a Letter of Intent with a request for a \$150 deposit.
- When the deposit arrives at the LCMS, placement is official. Congratulations!

PREPARATION PHASE: 6 months before you depart

- Anne Gonzalez, Manager, Short-term Training & Engagement contacts you and explains and guides you through next steps.
- You receive lots of support materials to prepare you. The LCMS team is available for any questions and needs during this time.

- You and your team meet several times to work through the preparation materials.
- You receive information, including phone numbers and specifics about where you will be serving and staying, what the culture is like, how to dress, etc.

DURING YOUR TRIP:

- You have everything you need: supplies, transportation, schedules, spiritual support and much more. You’re ready, and we’re praying for you!
- Your mission host is on site to guide you through your service.

COMING HOME:

- Debriefing is a very important part of your trip. You meet again as a team after the trip to process what happened.
- Reflect on the trip individually as well.
- Consider talking it through with your pastor or a spiritual mentor.
- This is not a one-time process. You will think about things and may want to process them at later times as well when you have more perspective. This is a good and healthy thing to do.
- Share the mission experience with your church.

Are you ready to reach out to our LCMS team and get your congregation’s team going? Visit servenow.lcms.org/short-term and to choose an opportunity, or email mission.teams@lcms.org.

MEET YOUR LCMS TEAM

It's time to set up your short-term team mission trip! Visit [serve-now.org/short-term](https://www.serve-now.org/short-term) and to choose an opportunity, or email mission.teams@lcms.org.

Now that you're ready to set up your international mission team, it's time to meet the LCMS people who will be with you on your journey. We're part of your team, too!



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