

THE FUTURE OF MEDICAL MISSIONS IS PARTNERSHIP

In 2015, CHA published a report on two phases of research that resulted in Recommendations for Practice related to short-term medical mission trips. In the two years since, I continue to be surprised by the feedback I get from Catholic health ministry leaders and associates who have participated in trips, as well as from our partners at the World Health Organization, medical surplus recovery organizations, diocesan mission leaders, those who receive or host these trips, and many others — pushback, insights, appreciation, qualms and questions that the research and recommended practices elicit.



**BRUCE
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What it has shown me is that these trips have depths of meaning that aren't easily quantified. The trips undoubtedly are life-changing for volunteers. But I also have found others who, like me, continue to grapple with intent versus outcomes. Does formation of U.S. volunteers and our need to reconnect to our call to be a health care provider

conflict with building a lasting foundation for health care in low-income countries? How much time is *enough* time for a trip? How can we most honestly and transparently promote such trips back at home — by the number of people served, or by the outcomes for those persons?

At the annual meeting of the United States Catholic Mission Association (USCMA) in 2016, CHA's research and recommended practices for short-term missions were highlighted. I gave a presentation to a group that included long- and short-term missionaries people who vastly differed in experience and even in the terminology they used.

For example, in Catholic health care “speak,” a short-term mission usually means one or two weeks in duration. However, at the USCMA conference, people who spent entire careers in one community abroad, or others who had years in a particular ministry and mission, all had their own forceful ideas about what long term and short term mean.

In one of the keynote presentations, Julie Lupien, director of From Mission To Mission (FMTM) tackled the topic, pointing out that the words missionaries use can create obstacles.

Her organization was started 35 years ago by a

group of returned missionaries who wanted to help others returning to the U.S. who were struggling with the difficult transition called re-entry. Over the years, FMTM has expanded to meet the changing face of mission. The group assists lay, religious and clergy who serve long term and short term, domestically and internationally, from preparation to re-entry.

By FMTM's reckoning, a long-term missionary serves for three or more years (these individuals usually are priests or members of a religious congregation). A long-term lay missionary or volunteer serves for from one to three years. A short-term missionary serves for a number of days or weeks.

Lupien is a missionary herself. She was a long-term lay missionary, and in coming home after her three years, she struggled through her own re-entry to the United States. For the past 16 years, she has channeled that experience into working with others returning from missions of all lengths. Her thoughts have been helpful in my own discernment about short-term missions, and they helped me turn a corner on how I see the activities taking place in Catholic health care following

Does formation of U.S. volunteers and our need to reconnect to our call to be a health care provider conflict with building a lasting foundation for health care in low-income countries?

CHA's two phases of research. I asked her to share some insights from her presentation and later conversations she and I had.

Lupien's insights, her deep passion for those who give of their time and talent to accompany another on a mission changed some of my perspective. There is much room for growth in making mission trips true partnerships. Our Americanism can, at times, get the best of us when we enter a community and very quickly determine "solutions" to problems that might not even exist in the minds of those who live there.

We must consider if we sometimes do things we would never do in the States simply because we feel unregulated and that the end justifies the means. These are deep things to consider, but ours is a mission — Christ's healing mission — and we must allow it to transform us and to witness to God's love.

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Those Who Receive the Missioners

JULIE LUPIEN

We have lots of great people out in the world who are motivated by their faith, a concern for others and for the Earth. They act on the belief that we are one human family, each of us doing what we know to do, with its limits and challenges, often totally unaware of others committed to the same motivations.

What I know is that we don't know each other. We aren't connected.

I think the future of mission is together. I think we need to see each other as both resources and companions in mission. Mission together is about moving beyond the traditional ideas of mission. Mission together is not about lay or religious, long term or short term, domestic or international. Mission together is "just us," family and friends, living the mission of Jesus.

I believe mission would look different if we made an effort to do what we do together. But first, we need to address some obstacles I believe are caused by the words we use. For example:

Labels. I've had long-term missioners refer to my experience with words like "only" or "just." For example, they might say, "You only lived there for three years."

I also have heard laypeople use "only" and "just" when they are talking about their own experiences in mission, and they say things like "I could never do what you've done" to long-term missioners.

Perhaps they mean to be self-deprecating, but using those kinds of labels sets up divisions instead of bringing us together.

Language. When we indicate that mission trips only refer to work done in another country, or that they aren't really mission unless they last for a certain length of time, we are putting limits to when and where God can work through us. God calls us out of our reality — lay, religious, long term or short term.

A number of laypeople don't identify with the word "mission." They call themselves volunteers and describe what they do as service. They connect with terms like peace, justice, empowerment, accompaniment and service — but not mission.

When I was thinking about how to clarify the way we talk about what we could do together in mission, three words came to mind — honor, dignity, legacy.

HONOR — When each of us lives out our baptismal call to mission; when we live mission together:

- We honor those who have shaped us and inspired us to live what we believe
- We honor those who show us how to live mission
- We honor the life and calling of those we collaborate with
- We honor the gifts and expertise of those we go with and go to

■ We honor the people we go to be with by showing respect and sensitivity, by graciously receiving what they have to offer us, and by being open to the transformation that our encounter provides

DIGNITY — Missioners are caring people. That is a given. But that is not enough. When crossing cultures, we need to understand how to respect the dignity of those we meet.

About 10 years ago, I was writing a resource for those involved in short-term mission. At my re-entry workshops, I asked the participants (mostly long-term missioners) what they wanted me to say, in the book, to short-termers.

Their answer was, “Tell them to stay home.” They said they found short-term missioners:

- Were concerned with money, stuff
- Didn't listen to what they were told
- Were culturally insensitive
- Caused more harm than good

But that's not what I wrote, because I don't believe everyone should stay home.

As Pope Francis said in his May 18, 2013 address in St. Peter's Square, “In this ‘stepping out’ it is important to be ready for encounter. For me this word is very important. Why? Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others ... with our faith we must create a ‘culture of encounter,’ a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak with those who think differently, as well as those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith. They all have something in common with us: they are images of God; they are children of God.”

When we are in mission together, we work to offer our best to those we encounter. We turn to each other for support to be educated, guided and challenged to be our best. Together, we can explore our purpose. Together, we can help to make connections and strengthen partnerships. Together, we can explore the methods and practice of mission. Together, we can ask the tough questions:

- Why are we doing this?
- What's our purpose?
- What kind of relationship do or will we have with those we will meet?
- What might our impact be in the short and long term?
- How does our plan honor the dignity of our partners?
- Should we even be doing this?

As Kim Lamberty director of university and mission engagement at Catholic Relief Services in Baltimore, says, “Accompaniment based in presence and relationship is equal and mutual and life-giving for everyone involved. The love we experience in relationships gives us power and courage and sometimes that is all we need.”

Our encounters of love and compassion with our sisters and brothers give each of us the power, courage, strength to face whatever we are facing in our own life. That is dignity.

LEGACY — When I think about legacy, I think about both the legacy I have inherited and the legacy I pass on. Whether God has called us to live long term in another culture or have a significant short-term encounter, mission doesn't end when we leave these places where we lived or visited. Legacy is about continuing to live what we have learned and live it in a way that will have a positive influence on those who come after us. Legacy is to live mission wherever we are, influenced by our previous encounters.

When I think about legacy, two words come to mind — transformation and integration.

To understand how we have been transformed by our encounters with our brothers and sisters requires prayer and reflection. Transformation doesn't just happen.

Integration doesn't just happen either. Integration is when we make choices, act or intentionally live the values and learning from our previous experience. It is when we allow our experiences in mission to impact how we live life and mission wherever God calls us.

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