

Raising Support for Short-term Mission Trips, including Sample Letters

What is the purpose of support raising? Many participants on short-term mission projects have felt the call of the Lord on their lives, but want to include others as prayer partners and as sources of financial support. The team members often are sent by local churches or organizations to accomplish a God-given goal. They are not on retreats or vacations, although the adventure aspects of the short-term mission experience are unparalleled. Money that is raised or contributed ought to be viewed as an investment in the spiritual growth and obedience of both those who are going and those using their resources to send teams.

It is also an investment in the mission field, because of the dental work that will be donated. Long-term missionaries and local leaders deeply appreciate the efforts of the teams that come to offer the dentistry that is rarely available in developing countries. Over 90% of people worldwide cannot access quality, safe dentistry, and many live in continual pain—with an impaired ability to eat and sleep difficulties due to ongoing dental need. Dental teams open doors and build bridges, share the Gospel in loving ways as they are allowed into the patient's personal space, and obtain the patient's almost immediate trust in ways very few missionaries can.

Dental teams encourage and often teach local medical/dental professionals, an educational exchange that builds relationships and new friendships. Teams also encourage the local church congregations, bring others to saving faith in Christ, and minister to those on the field personally. It allows teams to understand and appreciate diversity, while seeing God at work in many ways around the world through His followers. The efforts made by dental volunteers, and those who help them go, pay great dividends that often have lasting value.

A common objection to the short-term experience is that it costs too much. Is this true? It is true that mission trips may be costly, but, if one sees the money as an investment in the growth and discipleship of others, it really is not. When compared to the thousands of dollars people often spend on vacations that have little lasting significance, short-term mission trips bring a huge return. A mission trip is tax-deductible (often up to 50 % of costs can be saved.)

Participating in a dental mission trip gives a wonderful significance and refreshing outlook to the professional who uses his/her gifts to impact a hurting world. The dentistry provided is an invaluable gift to so many who have no chance to access dental care. Dental team members experience a different culture and people group as they go in obedience to the Great Commission. It is an investment in the spiritual life of all involved, giving understanding of God's purposes. Participation has an eternal impact on individuals, those they serve, and churches, both at home and around the world.

Another objection: Is the short-term experience a wise investment of funds? Is it better stewardship to send the money directly to the field? Can the field do the work better and cheaper? This objection may be correct in limited cases, such as some basic construction projects or to provide services locally available—if the only goal of missions is to get the job done. This is rarely

the case in dental missions. One cannot send money to provide nonexistent dental services. Since quality dentistry is not available in most developing countries, it is essential that dental personnel go to help in the many areas of great need worldwide.

The short-term mission experience is designed as a tool for discipling individuals and teams in servanthood and missions, as they provide services that needy people are often unable to access. While the dental work is important, it is equally desirable to build “world Christians” who can have influence beyond just one project/mission. If it is believed that it is better stewardship to send the money to the field to meet an immediate need, the other goals of long-term investment will not be accomplished—that of enriching relationships, changing lives of participants and national people, and possibly influencing short-term missionaries to follow the call to successive mission trips or long-term service.

How do I raise support for my short-term mission trip? There is a wide variety of views held concerning this issue. Many mission-minded people feel they would like to help send others since their schedule or health keep them from going themselves. Some churches set limits and restrictions on fund-raising. Important questions to ask include: 1) What will my church leadership allow in fund-raising efforts? 2) Are there worthwhile and successful ways to involve others in fundraising? 3) How will I keep records of funds received?

Please give me an example of what some do when raising support. Those who would like to involve others in prayer/financial support of their mission trip can offer the chance through letters, phone calls, or personal conversations with friends, family, and even patients or clients. This has been known to help build a dentist’s practice when his/her patients realize that their dentist is giving back in humanitarian ways to the needs of others. It is a great example of service for family, friends, and community members who watch how we live as Christians. Some team participants who aren’t sure they can raise the entire amount of a short-term mission trip break the costs into units:

---1/3 raised by the team member through support letters.

---1/3 raised by the team member through work or odd jobs (garage/auction/bake sales, other creative fund-raising ideas.)

---1/3 raised by the whole team and evenly divided by participants (or given by a Church Missions Committee or congregational offering.)

This models how the larger body of Christ works, using both those who send and those who go. Letting people know of a team member’s need, and praying to God concerning financial needs, are both biblical and require faith.

Are there scriptures that address this?

--Paul asked for assistance in carrying out his vision to share the Gospel. “...to have you assist me on my journey there...” (Romans 15: 20-24.) “I planned to visit you...and then to have you send me on my way...” (2 Corinthians 1:16)

--Do not fear the rejection of people. "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?" (Psalms 56: 3, 4)

--"Both riches and honor come from thee..." (1 Chronicles 29:12)

--Remember that everything belongs to the Lord. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine." (Psalm 50:12)

--Expect results as you sow. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8)

--"...always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." (Ephesians 5:20)

--"Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

--Having someone be on your support team is an opportunity for people to express in a tangible way their concern for the spread of the Gospel. "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me." (Philippians 4:10)

--"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

--"We know that in everything God works for good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

--Be honest with God. Avoid the attitude of seeing the financial need as your only goal. Do not be apologetic. You are a child of the King and a royal ambassador! "...whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and you will." (Mark 11:24)

-- Ask God to give you His boldness. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (2 Timothy 1:7)

--Do not compare yourself with others who are also raising support.

What about a support letter? The goal of a support letter is to develop a group of people who will join with you as you share Christ and serve others. They may pray for you and/or contribute funds to help cover the costs of the mission. By writing and distributing a "support letter," you will be informing friends and family of your desire to serve on a mission, and how they can participate.

What are guidelines for writing a support letter?

- 1) Type the letter, if possible.
- 2) Be concise. Try to keep the letter to one page. Make it to the point and catch the reader's at-

tention. Write something interesting that engages the reader.

- 3) Include this information:
 - a. the location of the mission
 - b. the goals of the mission
 - c. what you hope to accomplish
 - d. what you hope to learn
 - e. who is sponsoring the mission
 - f. the dates you will leave and return,
 - g. the specific amount of your financial support needs
 - h. how others can participate through prayer (list 3-5 specific prayer items)
 - i. how to give financially (make checks payable to your local church, for example)
 - j. a “thank you” for their consideration of being part of your support team.
- 4) Proofread your support letter and have another person look it over. Pray that the letter will be effective in communicating your team’s mission project, and that God would touch the hearts of people to support you or your team. Pray that these supporters will be blessed as they give.
- 5) Mail it out. Consider sending your letter to around forty people, including relatives, old friends, neighbors, patients, or clients.
- 6) After sending your letter, contact each person by phone or in person to ask their response and to answer questions. Write a note of thanks immediately to those who commit to supporting you in prayer and/or finances.
- 7) Within three weeks of your return, write a follow-up letter to your supporters. Do this while your experience is still fresh in your mind. Tell them how God worked through you and your team, as well as some new insights you had. Realize that you may be asking for their support in the future, and a thorough follow-up will be remembered.