

Missioners of Christ

SHORT-TERM
DOMESTIC YOUTH
MISSION



INITIAL PREPARATION
PACKET

Group Leader

V5

MOVING FORWARD... IN THE SPIRIT!

Thank you for your interest in participating on a Domestic Mission facilitated by the Missioners of Christ! The Missioners have been facilitating foreign and domestic missions for youth and young adults since 1996, and have learned a great deal through our experiences over the years, which has led to frequent “fine-tuning” adjustments to how we facilitate a mission, best serving both those whom God has placed in our paths at the missions we participate in, as well as those youth, young adult, and adult leaders that we have serving alongside us. Based on these past experiences and feedback from both participants and those we serve, we have put together this packet of information in order to help teams prepare for the mission.

We feel that it is absolutely essential that your adult leadership team be fully aware of all that is in this packet before sending in your parish application and that all adult leaders and youth participants be fully aware of its contents and expectations before coming. Should you choose to serve with us, we anticipate that you will find the schedule and experience significantly different from your previous experiences, especially if you have been involved with other work projects or mission groups. For that reason and for the sake of those we are being called to serve by our Lord Jesus Christ, we urge you to prayerfully consider all that is written here, so that your team might be able to discern whether you are called to participate with us on this authentic Catholic mission.

All training, guidelines, and even sacrifices expected of those who participate on this mission are implemented with one desired goal in mind; moving this time of service from a “great mission experience” to a true encounter with Jesus Christ. With the recent explosion of short-term missions across youth groups in our nation, it seems that both the *who* this mission is about as well as the *why* we do missions in the first place is being lost in many cases. Mission is not about us; it is about Christ and His people in need, and we go on these missions, quite simply, because Christ commanded us to “Go make disciples of all nations.”

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE MISSIONERS OF CHRIST

The Missioners began as a small prayer group (only 4 people!) in an “upper room” at the Library of Regent University in Virginia Beach, VA. The group shared a desire to engage an authentic Catholic Faith that was orthodox in teachings and dynamic in expression. From that desire grew a vision for discipleship, which placed mission as the central vehicle for drawing youth and young adults closer to Christ and His Bride, the Church.

Below we share with you our Mission Statement, as well as our common understanding of the Missioners identity and purpose. Our sharing here is not for the purpose of boasting or presenting ourselves as better than we are; truly, it has only been through the Grace of God that any fruit has come forth from the ministries He has entrusted to us. In spite of our many personal and even corporate shortcomings, we have consistently received confirmation that the Lord wishes us to

push forward in serving His people through this vehicle. We feel that if other teams get a flavor of who and what the Missioners are, then they can better make a prayerful decision on their desire to collaborate with us in service.

Mission Statement

Missioners of Christ is a Catholic Christian Community centered in prayer and united by covenant that evangelizes, disciples and sends forth youth and young adults on domestic and foreign missions to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ.

Identity

Missioners of Christ is a Catholic Christian community united by common prayer and common ministry. Our “four pillars” shape the essence of our formation and spirituality; we are ***Eucharistic***; understanding the Eucharist to be “the source and summit of Christian life” (CCC 1324), ***Charismatic***; believing in and calling upon the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are “at the service of charity which builds up the Church” (CCC 2003), ***Marian***; holding a special devotion to Our Lady, which is “intrinsic to Christian worship” (CCC 971), recognizing Mary as a “preeminent and... wholly unique member of the Church” (CCC 967), and ***Magisterial***; being submitted to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, whose “authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ” (CCC 85).

Our Covenant defines our commitments to each other and collectively to God, in how we live out our daily experience as a Missioner. This Covenant serves as a general rule of life, which allows us to be in solidarity with the greater Missioner community, whether we are in proximity to other members or not. The Covenant also reinforces and emphasizes aspects of the Catholic Christian life which are already expectations of the Church for its faithful, such as frequenting the Sacraments, stewardship, prayer and fasting, and charity to one’s neighbor.

Purpose

The Missioners of Christ has been called together to fulfill the Great Commission, “making disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). We are a discipleship community. Our primary focus is on youth and young adults, with our main means of discipleship being missionary service.

As God has blessed us abundantly with many gifts and as it is recognized that “much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more” (Luke 12:48b), our primary locus of ministry and service is *outside* of our community. We realize that more than two-thirds of the world does not even know Christ in slightest capacity and that many of the faithful that call themselves Christian are poorly disciplined. They are like the seed that “fell on rocky ground where it had little soil” that ended up being “scorched and withered for lack of roots” (Mark 4:5,6) – as soon as difficulties arise, their faith perishes and they become like “salt which loses its taste” (Luke 14:34).

Community is the fruit of our common prayer and common ministry. While fruit can be enjoyed, in and of itself, its ultimate purpose is to fall to the ground, die, and reproduce itself in abundance. In such, internal ministry is essential to the Missioners, such as prayer groups, retreats, social opportunities, formation, and intercessory prayer covering. Yet, these aspects are engaged in for the purpose of strengthening its members so that they may *go forth* in serving those much more in need than ourselves and are always in subservience to our vision and mission to disciple the nations, “for the love of Christ urges us on” (CCC 851).

AUTHORITY, SUBMISSION, AND OTHER FUN CATHOLIC CONCEPTS

We thought it would be good to share some of these concepts which are deeply rooted in our Catholic Faith right up front. These are quite counter-cultural to our society’s often individualistic, ego-centered values.

The Missioners facilitates missions in a manner which is consistent with living in a Religious Community; there are specific times set aside for prayer, meals, work, and sleep. This highly-structured schedule can be very difficult for our American sentiments to follow; we do not tend to like to be told what to do and when to do it, as it conflicts with our (often misguided) concept of “freedom”. Yet, this unity is both necessary for our formation of Community, and more importantly, for the service of those whom God has placed before us. We in no way promote uniformity; our all-creative God blesses each team with a diversity of gifts. The unity is where those gifts work together in symphony.

The Missioners of Christ places itself under the full authority of the Bishop and Pastors it serves under. Each mission also has a Mission Facilitator and often several “Deputies” that help carry out the different tasks needed for a successful mission. Your parish will also need to supply the name of an individual to be the “Parish Leader,” as well as “Deputies” for each gender on the team (the Parish Leader can also be the Deputy for his/her gender). These two or three people will then also become a part of the Mission Core Team.

By agreeing to participate on a mission facilitated by the Missioners of Christ, you are agreeing to function under the Missioners’ authority structure. It is important that all of your leaders and participants understand this before the mission. The expectations that go along with that structure are outlined for the Adult Leaders/Chaperons in MOC Volunteer/Chaperon Expectations and for the youth in Young Missionary’s Covenant/Short-Term Missions Expectation Sheet.

THE INGREDIENTS OF A MISSIONERS' MISSION

It's Not About Us...

Short-Term Christian missions in the United States have become a rapidly growing phenomenon. While in some ways this can be a good thing, the reality is becoming more and more clear that, especially with youth missions, the center of focus is often more on the “missionary” than those who are being served. In our earliest missions, we too fell into this line of thinking, and the results of the missions were very mediocre, culturally insensitive, at best, and perhaps even damaging. Even serving in domestic missions, we are dealing with a sub-culture different than our own. If we are truly looking to step into the lives of those less fortunate than ourselves (at least tangibly), then we need to be very careful not to come on these missions impressing our culture on another. In being more in solidarity with those we serve, it is important to leave some of the comforts of home behind (I Pods, youth's cell phones, getting soda and snacks at every pit stop on the ride up, etc.) We want the entire mission team to step away from their everyday, normal culture and be able to engage in the mission at hand.

This mission is about Christ and His children that He is calling us to serve. Still, it is one of the great paradoxes of our Faith that, “in giving you receive”. We have no question that if first we seek the Kingdom of God and put the needs of those we serve before our own, that you and your youth will be profoundly changed by the Holy Spirit. Keeping this in mind, we do ask that you screen carefully the youth who participate. Remember, we do these trips for those we serve, not for the benefit of the youth. Though it would be nice to take the entire youth group on these missions, remember that a youth who is not ready will most likely receive minimal benefit and may even damage the unity of the team. They could also damage the perception of Catholic Christians, in general, held by the people with whom we are serving and working. This being said, we recommend not making it too easy for a youth to come on this mission by just “signing up.” The expectations need to be set high, and mandatory training dates are a must. We will provide you with a detailed packet of how to do pre-mission training.

God can more easily work in “win-win” situations. As long as we keep in mind the acronym of J.O.Y. (focusing on Jesus, then Others, then You), our service is sure to bear fruit.

Faith

Those who have experience with other missions/work projects have usually commented on the much heavier emphasis on the Faith aspect of a Missioners' mission. We truly believe that when we are called to these missions, the fruit of service comes only from the fruit of prayer. So, we come first not to build a ramp or repair a house; we come first to meet Christ. In this way, if it just happens that there is a torrential downpour the entire week of service, and we are able to get very few jobs done, the mission is in no way a failure.

There are a variety of different components that together help shape the Faith aspect of the mission.

Prayer

Though we do go on these missions to serve those in need, the center of our mission is found in individual and communal prayer. We recognize that we have nothing to give others without first having received from God, and in that, we also recognize that our communication with Him is paramount to a successful mission.

The forms of prayer that the youth and adults will be engaging in on this mission are:

Personal Prayer – There is ½ hour set aside each morning for personal prayer for the team. Each member will be supplied with a journal that contains the theme, scripture readings, and Saint of the day, which are to be reflected on during this time. Youth and adults are also encouraged to bring other Christian Faith-based materials and such that may already be part of their personal prayer time on the mission. NOTE: Lying on one's sleeping bag with one's eyes closed and "meditating" is not considered an acceptable form of prayer for this time!

Morning Prayer (Communal) – A group of youth will be assigned for each day facilitating a communal morning service prayer right after breakfast. This usually amounts to ¼ hour and usually includes reflections on the day's themes and readings.

Praise & Worship – The evening sessions begin with ½ hour to 1 hour of Praise & Worship. P&W consists of primarily contemporary Christian songs that are sung as prayers from the heart. This is one of our primary forms of thanking the Lord as a community for the many blessings He showers upon us and of continually asking His intervention throughout the week. Please see Expressive Praise & Worship for further descriptions on this form of prayer.

Evening Prayer (Communal) – A group of youth will be assigned for each day facilitating a communal evening prayer service at the close of the evening session. This usually amounts to ½ hour, and usually includes a faith-building activity, final reflections on the themes and activities of the day, and a closing prayer.

Mass – On Sunday, we participate in the Holy Catholic Mass. On extreme circumstances, where we have been in a mission parish without a priest, we have had to participate in a Communion Service. Also, if the opportunity provides itself (such as when a priest is part of the mission team) we will participate in daily Mass, further spiritually strengthening our team, as the Mass is the highest form of Catholic prayer.

Adoration/Exposition – If we are fortunate enough to have a Priest or Deacon available, we will look to have at least one holy hour during the mission, which involves the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for adoration. This is accompanied by the usual prayers prescribed by the Church, as well as usually some worship songs, a homily by the Priest/Deacon, along with some times of silence before the Lord.

Other Prayers – Prayers such as the recitation and meditation of the Holy Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours) and others may also be prayed at different parts of the mission.

Altogether, that is about two to three hours of prayer each day! While some might see that as excessive, most agree following a mission that it is the bare minimum needed to do what God has called us to do. We realize that some of these prayers and prayer forms, all which are valid expressions of prayer in our Catholic Faith, will be unfamiliar to some who participate on the mission. The Missioners will do our best on the mission to explain and walk the team through new prayer expressions. As the Leader of your team, you may decide before the mission to go more into detail regarding some forms of these prayers if you believe your team may require additional catechesis. The Missioners will be more than happy to supply additional material to help with this at your request.

It is important to note that our prayer time is to be a time of unity. While it is understood that some may not be able to fully participate (such as a non-Catholic as Mass, or even someone who might have an aversion to expressive praise) it is still expected that the individual be present with the team and pray silently during the communal prayer time.

Teachings

Each day has a theme associated with it, which is briefly described in the missions journal which each youth and adult will receive at the beginning of the mission. Each evening we will have a different talk given by one of the Adult Leaders/Chaperones. All these teachings are to be fully in line with the Teaching Authority of the Catholic Church, and while not being “fire and brimstone,” are meant to really challenge the youth to look at their lives and see where changes are needed.

Each youth and adult will be provided with a Missions Journal at the beginning of the mission. This will have the daily theme, readings, reflection questions, and Saint for each day of the mission, as well as many pages to journal. We strongly recommend journaling throughout the mission, as it not only gives us something to look back on months later, but also helps us process the many experiences, emotions, and movements of the Holy Spirit that each member is dealing with from day to day.

Community

Building community among the team is an essential element of the mission. Drawing closer to each other through prayer and service strengthens the Body of Christ and provides for strong Christian friendships. These friendships can both support us by sharing the joy of the Lord and hold us accountable in difficult times.

In many ways, each mission team develops into its own sub-culture. This can often be a difficult process when attempting to unite multiple parishes on a mission, as each brings its gifts, shortcomings, and its own sub-culture. Small differences and misunderstandings (due to our own “humanness” and often exacerbated by the devil) can quickly become major sources of division – often fueled by adolescent “angst.” For this reason, *it is absolutely imperative that the adults remain united in all things on the mission!*

On missions, the Missioners of Christ implement a number of different strategies to help facilitate the growth of strong Christian relationships between all members of the team and

to help avoid (to the degree it is possible) the formation of “cliques”, which may or may not be parish-based. These include:

- Times of common prayer and praise everyday, including Mass and/or Adoration when available
- Mixing up the groups between their Share Groups (small group discussions), Prayer Groups (facilitate morning and/or evening prayer on one day of the mission), and Work Groups (at the worksites).
- Seating at most meals being by seating cards, which are mixed and rotated at each meal
- Clarity for the youth on expectations on guidelines and behavior as outlined in the Young Missionary’s Covenant/Short-Term Missions Expectation Sheet
- Clarity for the adults on expectations of conduct, authority, and facilitation as outlined in the Expectations for Chaperons.

Works

And of course, there is the actual work that we do on the work sites. We see this in two categories:

Manual Labor

We will be assigned (generally from referrals from our host) a number of different work sites where people are in need. These worksites can require anything from painting, to wall, ceiling, and/or floor replacement, to roof repair, to building a handicapped ramp. We will provide you with a Skills Identification Sheet which we will ask each member of your team to complete and submit at least two weeks prior to the mission. This will help the Work Crew Leaders to put together the Work Site Teams ahead of the mission, as well as to assign new people to new sites that are given to us during the week.

Spiritual/Evangelization

When we are serving at family’s homes, our work is not only done on their house, but on their hearts and souls as well. Many of the people God allows us to serve have had broken lives, and perhaps even bad experiences with the Catholic Church – while others who have been through such difficult lives end up being true witnesses of Christ to us!

For this reason, as much as the people allow, we look to have members of the team spending time with them and their families... mostly listening, but also sharing how God has worked in our lives as well

The week generally culminates with a cookout at the parish on Friday, for those we served, as well as for parishioners. The team shares some testimony and ministry with the group at this event as well.

A Note on Solidarity and Simplicity

We work in situations of poverty on these missions; both tangible/financial and spiritual. Some of the situations we come across can be quite depressing, and often are difficult for the youth who

participate in our youth groups to relate to. Christ consistently challenged his disciples to enter into the world of the poor, the oppressed, and the outcast. Still, for us it can be much easier to come in as the “privileged rescuer” instead of the “fellow Christian on the journey.” When a youth returns from a mission and responds, “I better appreciate what I have now,” they have missed the point. The question that greater reflects a solidarity with God’s people would be, “Do I really need all this *stuff* that I have?”

In small ways, we attempt to be in solidarity with those we are serving, which means for just this short period of time on the mission, we forgo some of our standard American comforts, consolations, and distractions. We do not bring I-Pods, cell phones (for the youth), and such on the mission. We go easy on the dressing “in-style” and the excessive time getting ready in front of the mirror in the morning. We don’t stop for the “slurpee break” when we get gas or to “reward ourselves” for our hard work. Our reward is in Heaven, and we need to help the youth to retreat from the many *things* in their day to day lives.

Admittedly, these “sacrifices” which allow us to free ourselves to enter into the mission and these people’s lives in a more communal way, are limited. But they are difficult, and often unpopular. But most would agree at the close of the mission, they are absolutely necessary. We ask you, if you choose to participate on this mission with your group, to assist us with promoting the spirit of solidarity and simplicity; we have not constructed an extensive list of “no’s” – it is more a mindset, or a mission sub-culture, that we ask you to help us cultivate in ourselves and in the youth.

MISSION PREPARATION / STRUCTURE / SCHEDULE

Preparation

Application

If, after reviewing all this material and speaking with your parish leadership, you determine that you feel God is calling your group to this mission, the Team Leader must first complete an application for his/her parish called Short-Term Domestic Mission Application. This identifies the parish, approximate anticipated number of youth, and the Male and Female Lead chaperones. There will also be some questions on this application which will assist us in preparing better for your team's specific needs.

Once received and reviewed, the Team Leader will be contacted by the Mission Facilitator to further discuss the mission details, including dates. If all is set and agreed upon, a follow up Short-Term Domestic Youth Missions Training Packet will be sent to the Team Leader. This will also include other paperwork which must be completed for the mission, including individual applications for each youth.

Fundraising

This is discussed briefly in the Getting Started document. The Missioners can help with ideas which other groups have used in the past – though the tried and true method has been personal letters written to family and friends, sharing what opportunity the Lord is placing before you, and asking their prayers and financial support. This is seen as not only fundraising, but evangelism, because it provides many who might not be able themselves to participate on a mission to become an integral part of one through you.

The cost of your particular mission is identified in the Initial Fact Sheet. Funds are generally due in three intervals; the \$25 deposit with the submission of each Individual Application, 2/3 of the total cost due six weeks prior to the mission (including the deposit), and the final amount due two weeks prior.

In the event that excess funds are raised, these are used to support the overall missions of the Missioners of Christ, and when appropriate, an additional contribution is given to the parish/facilities that helped house and care for us during our stay.

Training

Pre-mission training is an absolute must for a successful mission. The Missioners will provide you with a 5-Session training program that you can take your team through in preparation for the mission.

The Mission Week

The Domestic Mission generally runs eight (8) days, Saturday to Saturday, during the summer. The first evening is spent mostly in preparation, and the second day (Sunday), involves a team building activities and a mini-retreat, getting our team spiritually prepared and trained for what is to come.

Monday through Thursday are generally standard worksite days, with Friday ending early for the missions cookout with the parishioners and those we served. The evening includes ministry (testimony sharing, a drama, etc.), and closes with a Eucharistic Holy Hour (adoration and exposition) if a deacon or priest is available.

Saturday is primarily a clean up day, and then we start returning home.

A “Typical” Day’s Schedule

While you will find that one these missions there is no such thing as a “typical” day, and we have to be open to constant adaptation based on circumstances, the needs of the team and/or those we serve, as well as promptings of the Holy Spirit, we do strive to maintain some semblance of structure throughout.

7:00am	Wake up and get ready
7:30am	Personal Prayer Time
8:00am	Breakfast
8:45am	Morning Prayer
9:00am	Leave for work sites
12:00n	Lunch at the work sites
4:00pm	Return from worksites/Shower
5:30pm	Ministry Prep/Drama prep
6:00pm	Dinner
7:00pm	Praise & Worship
7:45pm	Testimony Sharing
8:00pm	Teaching/Talk
8:30pm	Small Groups
9:00pm	Evening Prayer
9:30pm	Snacks/Fellowship
9:45pm	Get ready for bed
10:30pm	Lights Out

WHAT NOW?

If what you have read about our mission experience is something you feel your group would be ready and excited to participate in, then perhaps your group is called to be on this mission with us. Once you've prayed about and talked to the appropriate parish leadership, complete the initial application and send it to us.

MISSIONERS OF CHRIST
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