

# What's Missing in Your Short Term Missions Program



Four Principles That Assure  
Successful Short Term Missions

## Dedication

To every missions or youth pastor or influencer  
in a church who has ever wondered:  
*"Isn't there a better, more effective way  
to do a Short Term Missions Trip?!"*



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# What's Missing in Your Short Term Missions Program?

## Four Principles That Assure Successful Short Term Missions

Successful Short Term Missions is not simply a matter of signing up 10 to 15 people to go to an exotic location to share the Gospel in some way. "What a great idea! Let's send a team to Chicago, or Haiti, or Africa, or India to share the Gospel with the people over there". Unfortunately, this is the way Short Term Missions has been done for many years. Often churches have little rhyme or reason for how it is running its missions outreaches and in particular Short Term Missions. It is not the fault of the church since this is how Short Term Missions has been done by so many for so long.

However, today, many churches and leaders are asking, "Is there a better way"? The book, *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, has opened a lot of eyes to some of the pitfalls of doing Short Term Missions the old way. It has inspired church leaders to want to do mission trips differently, to make sure they are making a real difference and having a positive impact for the Gospel.

Churches are asking, "So how can we assure that we are doing Short Term Missions well so that we are truly helping instead of hurting?" I believe there are four principles of successful Short Term Missions that, when implemented, will set you and your church on the right road to developing your own successful, dynamic, and impactful Short Term Missions program. These principles are so deep that entire books could be written about each one but this article will only scratch the surface to get you thinking. However, if you ask the questions brought up with each principle in the appropriate manner to the right people, your Short Term Missions program will begin to grow into the kind of program you will be proud of. You'll have far more impact on



both your people and the national church you engage with than you can imagine. You will be **helping** instead of hurting.

Just think of having Short Term Missions seen as a vital part of the ministry of your church, a ministry that everyone wants to be a part of. These ministries would have a strategic impact through integral ministry together with a partner across the street or across the world. This is all facilitated by partner agencies that make sure you are having a culturally relevant strategic impact. How awesome would that be? So how do we make that happen?

# **Principle One: Short Term Missions as a Vital Part of the Ongoing, Overall Ministry of the Church**

What is the best way to engage your people in Short Term Missions? How do you enable your entire congregation to be a part of your Short Term Missions vision?

The first question might be the hardest one initially as it is a question the church needs to ask of itself. Is Short Term Missions, both local and internationally, an integral part of the overall strategy of your church ministry? Short Term Missions needs to be seen, not as something that a church tries to do once a year, but as an extension of the ministry of the church that starts right where you are and extends the ministry of your church in some way or another to the “ends of the earth”, all year long.

Most often missions and ministries are seen as something we give money to, hear from a missionary once in a while, and send a yearly team of teenagers somewhere to “share the Gospel”. It is the first thing that gets cut when finances get tough. Unfortunately, it is often not seen as one of the priorities of the church.

The problem often is that we limit the mission of the church to the local community. It is a lot easier to be focused on ministry internally or only in the immediate vicinity. But the true mission of the church is far more exciting and varied than what we often encourage in the church. Acts 1:8 expresses the mission of the church in a nutshell. “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost ends of the earth.” Every Christian and every church has the responsibility to take the Gospel, both spiritually and practically, from where they stand all the way to the ends of the earth. Is your missions program integrated this way into the over-all vision and mission for your church?

If it is, then your church’s ministry and outreach starts with each member understanding that they are to have a part in sharing the Gospel, starting with their family and friends and working outward until they have the opportunity to share the Gospel in an ongoing way

to the uttermost part of the world. Your church will see all that it does in light of this vision. When your people catch this type of vision, the difference it will make in the life of your church will be palpable. To have something they can be a part of, know their input has meaning and is part of a larger strategic mission of taking the Gospel to the whole world is priceless. They will be far more engaged in ALL that the church does, not only in action, but in prayer, resources, giving, and support.

The foundation for a successful Short Term Missions program in a church is to have ways that everyone in the church can participate in “taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth”, even if they never leave the area. Participating in some way needs to be



seen as normal. Everyone should be expected to be a part of this effort in one way or another. As a result of this vision, the leaders will need to provide many opportunities for the members that will help them be a witness in word and deed from where they stand to the ends of the earth. Ways a church can provide touch points for everyone in the church varies from becoming prayer partners for missionaries, ministries, or for those who actually go on a trip, to sponsoring third-world children for schooling, being a part of feeding programs, both local and international, enabling participation in local ministries, to actually going on a team and all kinds of other opportunities in between.

It also means keeping opportunities and news of outreaches and missionaries in front of the people on a constant basis, Sunday after Sunday. It should be featured in the church bulletin, e-mails, notices around the church building and especially from the podium (such as an Outreach or Missions Moment). Have missionaries in the church on a regular basis, allowing and encouraging them to share in multiple venues about their ministry. It should be a regular part of the pastoral staff's conversations with your people from the pulpit, in committee meetings, life groups and with individuals.

In light of this philosophy of ministry, I would also propose that we change the name of the teams engaging in this from “Short Term

Mission teams” to “Ministry Impact Teams”. Being a part of a Ministry Impact Team is much less intimidating as it fits so much better with the philosophy that the team is simply “an extension of the ministry of our church around the block and around the world”. These ministry teams are simply a part of the on-going ministry of the church. The name better describes what the team is, what they are accomplishing, and that they are a part of what should be seen as “normal church ministry” with everyone in the church having a part in what is happening.

When Short Term Missions or Ministry Impact is a normal part of your church ministry emphasis and vision, you will find that it is the best thing you can do to engage ALL your people in vital ways in ministry. It flows naturally and people will be asking how they can be involved with minimal prompting from your staff.

## Principle Two: Long-Term Partnerships

When Ministry Impact is a normal part of your church DNA, you will find that a natural transition will be to seek out Principle Two: Long-Term Partnerships. If your church is looking for true ministry impact, then it has to be for the long term. Very little ministry is accomplished via short-term engagement. Yes, there are some things that will be one-time or short-term ministries. However, for maximum impact and engagement by your people, you need to focus on long-term partnerships that complement your church's make-up, interests, and resources.

Your question to any potential agency or partnership you are considering for your church should be, "Can we have a long-term relationship or partnership with them that will fit our church?" A long-term partnership is at the core of when helping really helps. **RELATIONSHIP** is what it is all about. Biblically there are only two things that count for eternity - our relationship to Christ, and then our relationship to those around us. We get so caught up in "doing" that we forget that Christ has called us to "being" first and foremost. Being a servant, loving one another, being a witness, being a light in a dark world. The "one another commands" all require relationship to be accomplished.

All of these demand relationship to be able to implement them as Christ would desire. So many US church teams want to DO something when what the people they are going to serve often want first is get to know you, and you them. As you



get to know them and their situation, then the "DOING" will naturally follow at the appropriate time. Many times those we minister to are not nearly as concerned with the "stuff" of life as we think they are, especially overseas. They want to know you are there for the long-term, that they can count on your prayers, your fellowship, encouragement, challenge, and resources when needed.

Our tendency is to want to do a "one-time" project for a group and then to move next year to the next hot spot or cool place to help out.

There are definitely times when this is needed for direct relief such as a natural disaster. However, most of the time, what is needed is a long-term partnership that will enable you to engage, over time, all the different segments of your church in one way or another. By developing relationships FIRST before getting too engaged with providing resources and funds you will find yourself being involved in ways that your partner truly needs, not what you think is needed. Long-term engagement helps you to understand your partner, their situation, their culture, and allows you to develop a solid understanding of what their true needs are.



You will also find yourself with a much better understanding of how your people can be involved in many different ways that will provide for a holistic ministry encompassing both the spiritual and the practical. You will experience being the hands and feet of Jesus in the midst of a different culture whether locally or globally as you minister to your brothers and sisters and with them into their community.

The concept of partners assumes that the other party has something to offer you as well as you having something to offer them. In God's economy, He uses both of you for maximum impact. That impact will be felt by both parties. Your goal is to minister to and with your partner in strategic ways. That will happen, but what you often don't see coming is that your partner will be used to minister into your lives as well. This ministry experience will energize your people and will raise their level of engagement and commitment in every area of your church life.

God calls us to partner together with Him in reaching the world for Christ. He has called us as the Church, not to be dependent on one-another, nor to be independent of each other. He has called us to be INTER-DEPENDENT on one-another. As the Body of Christ we need each other. That church down the street or across the world needs us, but we need them just as much. Our partners will challenge us in ways that we can't imagine. As many team members have said over the years, "we were ministered to, when I thought we were the ones going to minister". As we edify one-another and minister together

into the community, we experience the oneness we have through the Holy Spirit. What a great opportunity to better understand what the Church is all about.



## Principle Three: A Holistic Impact Strategy

As you develop your partnership, you will want to know how you can be involved with your partner. To be able to have long-term impact you need Principle Three: A Holistic Impact Strategy.

Successful long-term partnerships, once you begin to get to know each other, demand a holistic impact strategy of engagement together. Some partnerships are very specifically focused so that a strategy can be quite narrow. Others are much broader in scope and thus the strategy of engagement needs to be wider.

Your question to address together as partners is “What short and long-term goals for projects and ministry do we want to have together?” (see Principle Four for the best option to help you develop these goals.)

In a Short Term Missions partnership, there are impact points that are critical for an effective partnership. Your partnership should encompass the 5 impact points of evangelism, discipleship, social compassion, education/leadership development, and community development. These five “impact points” will enable you to have a well-rounded, very holistic ministry into the lives of both churches. By examining the needs of these impact points, your partnership will be able to develop a strategy of engagement together that encompasses both the spiritual and the practical. If done right, this strategy should enable every member of the US church to get involved in one way or another over time, even if they never go on a trip. This impact strategy should have “touch points” for everyone built into the plan so that it is a strategy your whole church can embrace, not just a select few.



A long-term, in-depth, holistic partnership requires understanding the relevant needs of both partners. One of the most effective and thought provoking question revolves around “how can we resource them to more effective ministry”? Most churches, either local or

global, don't need handouts, but resources and training they can then use to enhance the ministry of their church. Ask insightful questions such as "How can we help care for them, our brothers and sisters, in a way that will help right now, and provide dignity in the long term? What are their needs such as agricultural projects, animal husbandry projects, a bakery, church planting, evangelism training, discipleship programs, feeding programs, clothing, after school programs, helping with under privileged children, the homeless, job training, etc.? What types of ministries and projects can we do with them to impact and transform them, their church, and their community for Christ?"

All these concepts are part of a good strategic plan that will help provide the opportunity for long-term planning. With a developed strategy like this, you will be able to plan ahead for funding, for teams and the projects and ministries they will focus on, and to know how to best meet the needs of your partner. This strategy will provide you with a pathway for your partnership into the future.

## Principle Four: A Third Party Facilitator

To truly be able to maximize our partnerships, we need experts that understand both partners and their cultures, as well as help the partnership achieve maximum potential. This is why we need Principle Four: a Third Party Facilitator. **This is actually the most overlooked aspect of Short Term Missions. Yet it is one of the most essential components of a successful Short Term Missions program.** Most direct relationships to a local or national church or agency will eventually experience great conflict that frequently destroys the partnership. This is most often due to the fact that the partnership has no one to help them maneuver through the minefield of cultural differences. Having a good Third Party Facilitator that will guide both of you to cultural relevance to one another is worth its weight in gold. If they are doing their job right, your partnership will thrive and have life-transforming impact on both your people and those you are partnering with.

The question you need to ask of a potential Third Party Facilitator is, “How can your agency (or church) help my church (not just a team) have a STRATEGIC, culturally relevant, long-term impact in ‘X’ country, community, or church?” Do your best to NEVER go directly to a church or agency whether local or global even if it sounds good. ALWAYS try to find a third party agency or even church that can represent and facilitate your ministry with your potential partner. Any agency can handle your team. Not nearly as many can help you truly have a long-term partnership that will have strategic impact. Many agencies say they can help you with a church to church partnership (the new buzzword in Short Term Missions) but actually have very little experience, infrastructure or help they can provide you. It might take some looking, but it is well worth the effort to find an agency that can actually help facilitate your partnership effectively.



A Third Party Facilitator should have the staff, infrastructure, and experience to be able to provide:

- Culturally relevant interaction for all you do together
- Long-term, holistic strategy of development (see Principle Three)
- Facilitation of teams, projects, and ministries throughout the year for your partnership
- Accountability both financially, spiritually, and ministry/project-wise for both sides
- Counsel on how to navigate around the pitfalls of culture
- Team training and orientation so that your Ministry Impact Teams are well prepared and have a good basic understanding of the culture and ministries with which they will be engaged
- Safety and protection for your Ministry Impact Teams and your partnership in general
- The needed infrastructure and staff to accomplish mutual goals

A church may proudly declare, “We work directly with Pastor Jacques in Haiti”. However what they don’t share is that it has been fraught with issues, miscommunications and disillusionment on their part. When you have an agency that is looking after the good of both sides, helping to facilitate your partnership, you will be able to avoid all of this and you will find their help invaluable. The first time those cultural differences and misunderstandings arise, you will see the value in engaging a third party in your partnership. The Third Party Facilitator will be able to address these issues quickly. As team projects and ministries are planned, often many potential cultural blunders are caught before they become a problem. If you are going direct, you won’t know until you are there and in the middle of a project/ministry and the damage has been done. Many times you won’t know that you made a major blunder because the national church leaders don’t want to embarrass you, but they will have to do a lot of “damage control” when you leave.



You need a Third Party Facilitator that will be more than willing to tell you NO if it is not the right thing to do. **“No” is one of the most important words in missions.** It can help keep you out of a whole

host of problems. However, in many cultures or situations they simply cannot tell you “No” as they don’t want to harm the relationship or miss out on some type of help. Having someone who understands both cultures and is able to tell both sides “No” when needed is imperative both for local ministry and overseas ministry.

These four principles should be a part of any Short-Term Missions partnership and program:

1. Integrated ministry that brings missions, both local and foreign, to the forefront of church ministry
2. Long-term partnerships that enable everyone in the church, over time, to become engaged through prayer, providing resources, and going on a Ministry Impact Team
3. Holistic strategy for long-term impact that meets real needs while resourcing ministry opportunities
4. Third party facilitators that will maximize ministry, impact and cultural relevancy

They should be applied to all ministries in which your church is engaged in, whether your own community, your state, or around the world. Work on partnerships through agencies that will multiply your impact as a church. It has been suggested that even when partnering with a group or church in a different cultural context within your city you need to bring in a third party facilitator to help navigate those relationships. One African-American leader shared he felt this was essential for suburban churches desiring to work with African-American churches in the inner city since an agency that understands both venues and cultures will enable your ministry to be much more fruitful than if you partner directly with a church in this setting.

Short Term Missions carried out using these four principles will enable you to engage your church both locally and abroad in an exciting and impactful ministry. The 4 principles will enable you to “help and not hurt” no matter where you are working. They will help you to be culturally relevant as well as providing the appropriate resources to empower your partner in ministry. As you experience and see successes and life transformation happening, you will know you are on track with your strategy of holistic ministry with your partner. May the mission of your church reflect God’s heart: to be His witnesses from your home, your hometown, and to the ends of the earth.

## These Principles in Practice: Reciprocal Ministries International

RMI's mission is to mobilize global partnerships to transform lives in Christ. RMI accomplishes this principally through our C3 Partnership Program. This Connected Church to Church Partnership is specifically designed to be long-term, spiritual, strategic, culturally relevant, and practical.

RMI is a Third Party Facilitator, providing the above services and more to our C3 Partnerships. RMI's entire ministry is based on these principles. Should you desire to work in Haiti, RMI is ready to help engage



you in an incredible “church to church” long-term partnership with a Haitian church. RMI has been at the forefront of church to church partnerships since 1980. This is what we do.

Not only do we enable you to have this in-depth partnership, but we also provide many different touch points, from our Hope for Kid Child Sponsorship Program, to sponsoring goats for young people, to participating in a team visit, so all the members in your church can feel a part of this partnership with a church in Haiti. Some other ways are through on-going prayer needs, working on the provisions for projects for teams to take with them, praying for team members as they are in ministry, and many other opportunities made possible by our Impact Point Strategy.

RMI has 200+ churches in Haiti ready to partner with your church. These are conservative churches that are growing and already reaching their communities for Christ. They are looking for like-minded US churches ready to minister into their lives, send teams to engage in ministry together, and help transform their communities for Christ. RMI's 45+ “on the ground” staff are ready to help you develop your own

customized Impact Strategy for your partnership.

Our desire is that as a result of being involved in a C3 Partnership, your church will be better equipped to share the Gospel; their perspectives will be changed, seeing opportunities where they may not have seen them before. They will see that missions isn't just a trip that you take, but it's a life that Christ has called us all to lead. This is our heart, soul and passion: to facilitate missional relationships and encourage each church member to be a missionary.

Please contact us for more information on how we can help facilitate your partnership in Haiti or help you in other areas through our mission consulting services.

## **Become a C3 Partner!**

Call RMI at 239-368-8390

email [info@rmibridge.org](mailto:info@rmibridge.org)

or go to [www.RMIbridge.org](http://www.RMIbridge.org) for more information.

## About the Author

Having grown up in Haiti as a missionary kid and then spending 25 years living and ministering full-time in Haiti, Dan Shoemaker has a unique understanding of the needs of the Haitian churches, communities, and schools. Since becoming President of RMI in 2006, he has had the opportunity to continue to see Haitian lives transformed in Christ with hope for their future. He and his wife, Debbie, have 2 adult children and 2 grandchildren. Although Dan grew up riding enduro motorcycles in Haiti and used that mode of transportation during his service in Haiti, he recently fulfilled his dream of getting his US motorcycle license and is enjoying riding with the motorcycle club from his church. He also enjoys reading and cooking. Since moving to the US he has taken up kayaking and enjoys paddling around the backwaters of Southwest Florida.



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