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**IS LOVE ENOUGH? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SHORT-
TERM MISSIONS**

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**Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2012
October, 2012
St. Louis, MO**

Is Love Enough?

A Phenomenological Study of Short-term Missions

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Abstract

For the past 10 years, a Central Texas congregation has partnered in service with a residential children's home in Guatemala. The purpose of this study was to examine perceived outcomes of the sending congregation's short-term mission trip to the residential child caring facility from the perspective of participants. Twenty-nine interviews were conducted with both past and present participants. Low level coding and the resulting themes revealed the impact of this trip on three separate groups of people, those at the residential child caring facility, those who participant on the trip, and the sending congregation. In hopes to triangulate results, participants were asked to participate in a survey used to measure levels of personal ethnocentrism and materialism. Results of this study show the importance of communication between lay leadership and church staff as well as the importance of preparation and reflection in creating a meaningful, long lasting change in participants.

Keywords: Short-term missions, congregations, networking, partnerships

Introduction

Participation in short-term missions was stimulated in the United States between 1950-1960 with the establishment of organizations like Operation Mobilization (OM) and Youth with a Mission (YWAM) (Priest, 2010). The establishment of these types of organizations changed the definition and availability of missions. Before the establishment of these agencies, long-term missions required a commitment of no less than three years, compared to today's average short-term mission (STM) trip lasting between 7 to 14 days including travel (Priest & Priest, 2008). A recent study conducted by Robert Wuthnow (2009), head of Princeton University's Sociology Department, calculates "that at current rates, the lifetime probability of particular church members going abroad on a short-term mission trip could reasonably be 20 to 25 percent" (Priest, 2010, p. 86). With what Priest conservatively estimates as 1.6 million Americans participating on STMs abroad in 2005, costing nearly 2.7 billion dollars, one has to wonder what impact these trips have on both participants and respective host country Christians.

Some missiologists and career missionaries have negatively referred to short-term mission participants as "dogs running through an art museum: 'They see everything and understand nothing!'" (Priest & Priest, 2008, p. 54). A common story used to describe STMs from the perspective of hosts is "Dancing with Elephants":

Let me tell you a story about Americans, an African Christian friend said to me. Elephant and Mouse were best friends. One day Elephant said, "Mouse, let's have a party!" Animals gathered from far and near. They ate. They drank. They sang. And they danced. And nobody celebrated more and danced harder than Elephant. After the party was over, Elephant exclaimed, "Mouse, did you ever go to a better party? What a blast!" But Mouse did not answer. "Mouse, where are you?" Elephant called. He looked around for his friend, and then shrank back in horror. There at Elephant's feet lay Mouse. His little body was ground into the dirt. He had been smashed by the big feet of his exuberant friend, Elephant. Sometimes,

that is what it is like to do mission with you Americans, the African storyteller commented. It's like dancing with an Elephant. (Adeney, 2000, p. 9)

Radecke (2010) suggests, "The goal of short-term missions should be to establish meaningful, mutual and ongoing relationships" (p. 22). Rather, the focus of a short-term mission trip should center on relationship and being, not doing. Jeffrey (2001) suggests the downside of STMs as this, "North Americans often come seeking the emotional rewards of hands-on involvement rather than a way to make an investment in long-term empowerment" (p. 5). By giving up time and money to come so far, participants of STMs have an opportunity to "convey a sense of love that pays off in increased self-esteem and encouragement among recipients" (p. 6).

This study sought to answer the question: What are the perceived outcomes of a short-term mission trip to Guatemala according to both past and present participants? The data provided from this phenomenological study will provide congregational leadership and social workers with outcomes participants think this type of trip has on the children whom are served each year, the lives of those who participate, and on the sending congregation. Howell (2009) states, "Short-term missions merit social scientific observation as well as missiological reflection" (p. 206); therefore through both observation and reflection the authors aim to help congregations continue to develop holistic and sustainable short-term mission programs.

Literature Review

The Impact of Short-term Missions

Kurt Alan Ver Beek, Professor of Sociology at Calvin College, published a study he conducted with 127 participants in short-term mission trips who had participated in house construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch; the purpose of this study was to discover what long-term impact, if any, short-term mission experiences had on a short-termer's lifestyle. Ver

Beek (2006) found “North American short-term mission participants reported a small positive, lasting change in their lives as a result of their short-term experience in Honduras” (p. 490).

Gibson (2010) produced a review on the impact he discovered short-term missions had on congregations. He concluded, “One of the benefits of short-term missions that I regularly see is an expanded attitude of gratitude, a change in perspective regarding all of the things God has given us” (p. 25). Although seldom does this attitude of gratitude spill over into what Ver Beek would call “tangible results”, many former short-termers do increase giving to short-term mission efforts; “short-term missionaries want others to have the same life-changing experience they did and are willing to help make it happen” (p. 25). Amidst these benefits, Gibson also notes that, “enlisting, equipping, and sending people on short-term mission trips raise the *missional temperature* of a congregation” (p. 25).

Trinitapoli and Vaisey (2009) conducted a study among adolescents who participated on one or more short-term mission trips. They concluded, “Adolescents who go on a short-term mission report increased religious participation and solidified religious beliefs” (p. 121), although, “Questions about the long-term effect remain” (p. 141).

Dr. Dennis Horton (2011) conducted a study to measure the effect of three particular variables in the lives of those who have participated on a variety of short-term mission trips: ethnocentrism, materialism and involvement in long-term missions/ministry involvement. He found that involvement in short-term missions changed two out of the three variables in a statistically significant way. These two variables were a participant’s levels of ethnocentrism and materialism. Through these examples and more, research suggests short-term mission trips do, in fact, affect participants and congregations, although the need for continued study is repeatedly expressed. This study will add to the subject of short-term missions and its impact on participants

and congregations in hopes to keep up with the expansion and use of short-term missions as a model of ministry.

Methodology

Research Context

The context for this particular study is a residential child caring facility that houses 103 children between the ages of zero to 18 located in Guatemala. The children are sent to, or voluntarily come to, this residential child caring facility for a multitude of reasons. Some come from abusive homes, and others have been neglected by parents due to substance abuse or extreme poverty. Other children simply come because their parents cannot afford to pay for the children's education and/or provide for their wellbeing. At any moment, children can be, and are, retrieved by their legal guardians. Individual sponsors pay for the children's education and the facility offers children spiritual education, sports activities and occupational therapy based upon need.

Sample and Data Collection

The sample used in this study is both purposive and convenient. Twenty-one 2011 participants were interviewed as well as four participants from past years. A total of 25 individuals were interviewed. Twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were conducted overall; of these, 14 interviews were conducted while in Guatemala, while the other 15 interviews were conducted post trip. It was deemed necessary to repeat some interviews that were conducted on the trip due to either a lack of sufficient data or time; therefore, four interviews with 2011 participants were repeated post trip. Although most interviews were conducted one on one with the interviewer, four interviews conducted during the trip were done in twos, two post trip

interviews were done in twos, and one post trip interview was done in a group of three. This was for the convenience for both the interviewer and the participants.

Interviews lasted from five minutes to two hours. The interview guide is included in Appendix A, but questions often changed throughout the interviews as a result of answers given to the interviewer.

In an attempt to triangulate the information from the interviews, data was verified through multiple sources. Participants of the most recent trip to Guatemala were asked to complete a pencil and pen survey at some point during the trip (See Appendix A). With his permission, Dr. Horton's survey was used to measure changes in participant's levels of ethnocentrism and materialism. Dr. Horton's survey included 79 questions. However, to include only questions that addressed ethnocentrism and materialism, the survey was shortened to 32 questions. These 32 questions addressed the variables found in Dr. Horton's research to be statistically significant, ethnocentrism and materialism.

The primary interviewer also recorded approximately four hours of field notes. These observations include participants' thoughts and reflections outside of interview questions, the primary interviewer's own reflections and observations, and team reflection meetings. These field notes helped inform the context of research for this study.

Data Analysis Procedures

All transcribed data was inserted into a database and the software package, Atlas Ti, was used to code the data. Each transcript was read and statements were grouped into meaning units that then formed codes. Two hundred and ten codes were developed from the 29 transcripts. These codes were used to develop themes that created the narration of the perceived outcomes which are located in the findings section below. Low-inference coding was used; multiple coders

were not involved in the process of establishing codes and themes, although many times throughout the coding process the researcher consulted with Baylor University Social Work research professor, Dr. Johnny Jones, and faculty advisor, Dr. Gaynor Yancey.

To analyze the survey, each individual survey was scored according to Dr. Dennis Horton's instruction. Depending upon what answer was given the participant scored anywhere from "1 to 5". The questions addressing ethnocentrism were scored, added together, and divided by 15; the questions addressing materialism were scored, added together, and divided by 10. The number produced marked where a participant scored on either of these variables. The data was kept in a MS Excel spreadsheet, in a password protected computer, and compared to Dr. Dennis Horton's data.

Findings

Perceived Outcomes: Defining Impact

When participants were asked what difference this trip has made in the lives of those who participate, the lives of those at the residential child caring facility and on the sending congregation, participants, both past and present, instead answered, what *impact* this trip has had in the lives of those who participated, the lives of those at the residential child caring facility and on the congregation as a whole. Discussing impact becomes very important as it is one of the main perceived outcomes of the sending congregation's short-term mission trip to Guatemala by participants. The sending congregation's short-term mission trip to Guatemala affected three distinct groups: those at residential child caring facility; those who participated in the trip; and, the congregation.

Impact on Residential Child Caring Facility

The group's ability to meet and fulfill needs is the main impact participants identified when asked the question, "What differences did you notice this trip makes in the lives of those at the residential child caring facility?". When asked to expand on this idea of meeting and fulfilling needs, participants identified a variety of needs they felt the group fulfilled and met. The needs identified by participants correlate well with Maslow's hierarchy of need. McLeod (2007) states, "Maslow presents a hierarchy of needs pyramid which can be divided into basic (or deficiency) needs (e.g. physiological, safety, love, and esteem) and growth needs (cognitive, aesthetics and self-actualization)" (Introduction, paragraph 4). The needs met by the group were categorized in two categories, lower-level basic needs and higher-level growth needs. Lower-level basic needs include those regarding safety and physiology. Higher-level growth needs include those regarding love/belonging, esteem and self-actualization.

Lower-level basic needs. McLeod (2007) states, "One must satisfy lower-level basic needs before progressing on to meet higher-level growth needs" (Introduction, paragraph 4). Participants identified three primary lower-level basic needs that the team was able to meet prior to and during the week; the provision of supplies; meeting the children's educational needs, and providing vacation to both the children and staff of the residential child caring facility.

Through the provision of supplies and tuition, the group felt they were able to fulfill and meet practical needs of the children. By bringing supplies such as black shoes and underwear one participant identified, "that it helps them out a lot and means so much to them." Education was also identified as a practical and tangible goal that the team meets. According to team leaders, "it costs approximately \$15,000 for 80-100 children to go to school per year." Through individual donations, team leaders are able to bring a sum of money to benefit the children's educational needs each year. Participants mentioned how important education is to the children.

“[We are] providing financially for them to go to school so they can progress and beat the system, especially for those who never go back to their parents.” Many of the participants see education as a means of self-sufficiency and a way for the children to live successful lives.

Not only do many participants take vacation time to participate on this trip, but many also feel the team provided a vacation to both the children and staff at the residential child caring facility. The week spent there is identified by participants as a break from a very regimented and disciplined life, a routine change. Both of these things were identified as being important in the life of a child. One participant said, “The week we are here they get to be kids.” The week provides fun activities including a New Year’s Eve party, complete with song, dance and fireworks, a visit to the local Mayan ruins with a pizza lunch and flying of kites, arts and crafts, and days that consist of constant playing.

Not only did this week bring elements of a vacation to the children, but it also was identified to provide relief for the residential staff. One participant stated, “We can really take a lot off the worker’s plate” and another “they get a little break from taking care of the kids.” Although staff members still maintained the day to day functions while the team was present, a great deal of care and attention is provided by the team, taking some of the emotional strain off staff members. The team also provided the workers with an evening out which is often, their only night out as a group the entire year. Another respondent stated, “They need a moment of reprieve and it’s good that we can give them just a moment and a night out. Everyone needs that.”

Higher-level growth needs. McLeod (2007) states “Every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization” (Introduction, paragraph 5). “In self-actualization a person comes to find a meaning to life that is important to him”

(Introduction, paragraph 6). Participants identified many higher-level growth needs they felt they were able to fulfill in hopes to help a child move towards what Maslow would identify as self-actualization. These included reminding the children and staff of God's love through worship-based interactions, offering joy, hope, love, and creating lasting and meaningful relationships.

“We gave them love and affection, and worship based diversion,” said one participant. Through follow up contact, a participant reflected on how one young boy at the residential child caring facility said his favorite parts of the week were playing and listening to the word of God. Each morning, the team divided itself and the children into small groups, teaching Scripture, playing a related game, or making a related craft. One participant shared, “I think for a week when we're there, they are reminded of God's love in a real practical way from people that care for them.”

Joy seemed to be a major provision participants felt they were able to provide, especially in the midst of the founder's recent death. One participant said it this way, “they find a little joy and new life; they know someone is caring for them.” Local volunteers and staff also identified that the children look forward to this team's arrival and even begin asking in July when this group will arrive. A major goal of this trip in the eyes of participants seemed to be, “to go and play and make them happy.”

Much like joy, hope seemed to be a major provision the participants expressed they were able to provide. In describing the trip a participant said, “I think it gives them hope to continue going on even when it's hard” and possibly even “keep some of them going throughout the year.” Several participants identified that they believe this trip gave the children hope-- hope for a future, hope to persevere.

Most participants, if not all, shared that love was the number one need, which this team met. One respondent expressed it this way, “They need people to play with them and love them, physically touch them and hug them....to pack as much attention and love in one week. That is what this week is about.” This trip allowed participants to “love on” the children. One participant described how this motivation or agenda has been questioned by others; “there have been conversations that question our reason for coming and holding babies and loving kids.” Nonetheless, participants described demonstrating love through acts of care and attention bypasses all other agenda items. One respondent indicated “We have things we want to do like VBS, but I think our agenda is the relationships with the kids, to love the kids.”

Through loving on the children, deep and meaningful relationships were created between the children and participants. A respondent described these relationships like this, “There is a seed that is planted that there is someone there who loves them and they can do the same.” Relationships formed with participants allowed the children to embark on the risk of love. Reflecting on the importance of relationship, one participant explained that the team’s presence “teaches them about the importance of relationships, not just among themselves, but with others outside the home.” This risk is a safe venture for the children because of the consistency of the sending congregation’s long-term commitment to this residential child caring facility. One participant explained, “Ten years shows consistency. They know we are coming back and I think that is what makes this group special. These kids know we are coming back.” Many have been told by local volunteers and staff that this group is one of the few to return year after year. One long-term participant reminisced about the process of building trust with residential staff: “It was several years before the director and founder trusted us and started opening up and sharing their needs. I think a lot of groups just come once or come with an agenda.” Ultimately the residential

child caring facility has come to understand that “this is a group that is really committed in coming back,” hopefully making it far less risky to love and safer to build relationships with members of this group.

Building trust was particularly important as some of the children’s past situations have hindered that ability. A participant stated, “They are mostly children who have had some sort of difficulties in their life. Sometimes with that come trust issues and a real cautiousness of people in general.” Therefore if, “we say we’re coming back next year, and when we come back next year they can believe us. And maybe what we are telling them about how Jesus loves, they can believe that too.” Not only did participants believe their consistency and long-term commitment influenced the children’s ability to trust them, but also it impacted their ability to trust God’s love for them. All in all, participants believed that they were a positive force in the lives of the children and developed deep, meaningful relationships. These relationships and personal commitments were the driving force behind many participants’ consistency in returning.

Impact on Participants

The second group this trip affected was the actual participants. Participants answered the question, what differences did you notice this trip makes in the lives of those who participated, in three primary ways. This trip served as an opportunity to gain new perspectives, helped define a participant’s purpose or vocational calling, and renewed personal spirituality.

New perspectives. Gaining new perspectives happened in a variety of different ways. Participants discussed the ways in which the children and local staff lived and loved as a model for future behavior. In describing the founder, one participant said, “She would take your face in her hands and kiss you. She had so much humility and no vanity. It was good for this church to see that.” Other participants described the children’s ability to share, accept, love, care and

sacrifice on behalf of one another as an example in which to live up to, “an example of how to live like Christ.”

Not only did those at the residential child caring facility teach participants how to live, but they also taught participants how to love. One respondent said “I learned how to love everybody; I have always grown up hearing you have to love everybody, you don’t have to like everybody, but you have to love everybody. I struggled with how to do that. I feel like the kids really showed me that.” Not only did the children teach participants how to love other people, but also, “watching them makes you want to love Jesus more” as one participant shared.

Others noted how this experience increased their appreciation for what they possess. “It gives you a whole new perspective on how to appreciate the things you have; you walk out of this experience feeling truly blessed for the things you have and what you have been given.” Many acknowledge a privileged lifestyle in comparison and the importance this trip can have on the lives of those who participate. For example, one participant noted “I think it’s important for them to see how other people live and be grateful in how other people live.” Attitudes of gratitude or an increase in appreciation compelled others to recognize the need to, “use my gifts and blessings to help others.”

Many participants claimed this trip affected the ways in which they viewed the world. “I view things a lot differently now.” One participant even claimed that the success of this trip “depends upon whether or not we can show young people who have so much more than they ever need, that there is a way of living without all of the frills.” New perspectives offered by the experience itself, by the children or residential staff, or by the culture is another major perceived outcome of this short-term mission trip to Guatemala.

Purpose and vocational calling. This trip was described by many to be life changing. “It has completely altered me”; “this is the best thing that has ever happened to me”; and “it has changed the direction of my life” are phrases that captured participants’ description of life changing. Participants, particularly between the ages of 13-29, described how this trip served as a way to discern God’s calling on their lives. For example one participant stated, “I feel like God has called me to mission work and I need to get started”, another reflected “I think I might be going somewhere in the ministry but am not sure yet; this can help along the way.” These are all responses related to how participants are discerning vocational calling through this life changing experience. Although this affected particularly the younger generation, older participants also described this trip as life changing. At least two described how after retirement, continuing to come to Guatemala on a more regular basis will be an important aspect of their future ministry.

This trip gave participants an outlet to understand how their skills and educational training could be used to help others. In explaining future professions, participants stated, “I want to do nursing so I can help other people. That is why I chose nursing, so I can further my mission work.” Another respondent said “I want to get an engineering degree so that I can help others.” Throughout the week, the team held a medical clinic in which a professional doctor, pharmacist, nurse and nurses in training examined each child. This is a major example of how this trip did, in fact, allow participants to use their skills and educational training to benefit those at the residential child caring facility. Still for others, it confirmed their calling to “minister to the poor and orphaned and widows.” As one participant put it, “the way you can change people in the world is through love.”

Spiritual renewal. This trip served as what one participant described as, “an awakening of what God is doing.” Some participants described finding their niche through this type of

service. One participant identified that “mission trips have always helped me connect with God; my heart and worship style really rests in missions.” For others, this trip helped strengthen their personal faith. One participant stated, “Coming down here helped sort of steel my faith.” Others described this trip as a way to draw closer to God, as a spiritual revamp, or a spiritual get away.

Still others, experiencing the unconditional love of the children at the residential child caring facility, described it this way, “it just kind of restores your soul just to be in the presence of someone who has so little but is so giving and so loving.” It also drew many to diligently pray for the children. Yet for others the trip served as a way they experienced authentic community. “This trip has been pivotal in making me feel like I am part of authentic community. For that brief part of time we were a family doing the same thing.”

Levels of ethnocentrism and materialism. Participants from this year’s trip were asked to partake in a survey that was used to measure personal levels of ethnocentrism and materialism. This survey was administered to participants while on the trip. Although more than half submitted the survey before leaving the airport, some participants chose to fill it out during the trip. Participant scores were based on a 5-point Likert scale, with a score of 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. The group’s average score for the variable ethnocentrism was 1.75, indicating a very low level of ethnocentrism. The scores did vary slightly by age, with the oldest age category scoring an average of 2.13 and the youngest a 1.59. Though the oldest age category showed a higher-level of ethnocentrism, based on the 1-5 Likert scale, this average is still a relatively low score. When compared to Dr. Horton’s data (2011), it seemed to be quite similar, therefore reflecting that this group has a relatively high level of appreciation for other cultures.

In analyzing levels of materialism, participant scores were again based on a 5-point Likert scale, with a score of 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. The group’s average

score for this variable was 2.07, again indicating a relatively low level of materialism. The scores again varied slightly by age, with those between the ages of 18-29 scoring the highest with a 2.39 and those between the ages of 46-59 scoring the lowest with a 1.63. When compared to Dr. Horton's data (2011), again the scores seemed to be quite similar.

When the number of short-term mission experiences are taken into account, those who have participated in four or more short-term mission trips scored lower than the group's average for both ethnocentrism and materialism, 1.56 and 1.9 respectively. For those whom it was their first short-term mission experience, the level of ethnocentrism on average was 2.09 and the average score for materialism was 2.36, both higher than the group's average. Therefore participation in one or more short-term mission trips does in fact seem to lower personal levels of both ethnocentrism and materialism.

Discussion

Successful Short-term Missions through Preparation and Reflection

Lamberty (2009) delineates four elements to a quality short-term mission program. The first two deal with a team's preparation in familiarizing themselves with a host's culture, context, history and language as well as clearly defining goals that include building relationships, genuine cross-cultural experiences, and long-term commitment. The experience should be based in mutuality, which is Lamberty's third element. The last element rests in the team's effectiveness in "facilitating profound personal and spiritual transformation on the part of the visitors that translates into future action" (p. 74). This short-term mission trip to Guatemala encompasses two out of the four elements Lamberty described; this short-term mission trip to Guatemala encompassed clearly defined goals and purpose and is based in mutuality for reasons discussed in previous sections.

Literature shows that both pre-trip preparation and adequate reflection are two elements that can help produce quality short-term mission programs; therefore, the importance of these themes are developed further. Proverbs 19:2 (NIV) provides a biblical framework for pre-trip preparation stating, “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.” Pre-trip preparation becomes a necessity in having a quality short-term mission program. Rodewald (2010) says, “When we serve in another cultural context without an understanding of those to whom we witness, we run a high risk of causing unintended consequences” (p. 50). Participants who return year after year provide a unique dynamic to this idea of preparation, because the expectation of wanting to know what to expect is already fulfilled for them. However, it is apparent through the interviews that knowing what to expect and the desire for more organization were prominent themes among participants. Therefore, how does leadership fulfill both needs, knowing that preparation is a desire and element of a quality short-term mission program? Keeping in mind, as Koll (2010) states, “There is no way that short-term visitors can be adequately prepared to capture all the interactions of social religious factors in a particular location, but some prior knowledge of the context can make it less likely that visitors will misinterpret what they see and experience” (p. 94).

The process of group reflection was another dynamic some participants wanted to increase, while others felt the last night served as an adequate group reflection time. Literature suggests, “Reflection is the key to learning from an experience” (Gingerich, 2007, p. 10). Asking questions such as, what have you experienced?, what do you think about that experience?, and what did you learn from that experience? are all questions that can help a participant move from just having a cross cultural experience to engaging in lifelong learning. Missed opportunities are created through not allowing enough time and space for a participant to reflect on their

experience. Koll (2010) states that, “Ongoing reflection can help participants integrate their new experiences into their daily lives and the life of the congregation in ways that can lead to transforming action” (p. 94).

Like Lamberty, Ver Beek (2006) identifies common characteristics in participants that demonstrate lasting change. “The amount of pre-trip preparation, the amount of learning the participants experienced during the trip, and whether they stayed in touch with the community where they worked” all seem to be characteristics in a quality short-term mission program that produce lasting change (p. 490). Scholar Terry Linhart notes that “without substantive knowledge and reflection, the trip possesses a spectacle quality with a curricular hope that students would somehow positively grow from the formative encounters” (p. 207). So again the question becomes how can leadership meet both parties in the middle while developing and fostering lasting change in participants?

Relearning How to Dance: Moving Beyond Partnerships

Lee (2002) says, “This is an age of networks” (p. 581). Although identifying partnership as the third stage in the development of mission-church relations, Lee does not identify partnership as being the most effective model for mission-church relations. He states that, “there is now a call for a movement that goes beyond partnership towards networking” (p. 580). Networking provides a better image of “doing common mission together” (p. 580) because “in networking there is no longer a movement that goes from the sender and giver to the receiver, or from the rich to the poor, or from the North to the South. Instead, there is a movement that leads from brokenness to healing, from division to reconciliation, and from injustice to justice” (p. 581).

Reissner (2001) uses dancing as a creative way to describe authentic partnerships in the 21st century. She, like Lee, agrees authentic mission partnerships are moving more to the rhythms and art of networking. Networking is identified as a particular skill in her last step of dancing, “imagination” (p. 9). Reissner shares a common definition of partnership, agreeing with Lee that partnership requires a number of things including mutuality, openness and transparency, sharing of power and ultimately “to build an authentic partnership takes time and requires patience in an attitude of humility” (Lee, 2002, p. 579). But both conclude that partnership is not the last step. Both conclude that it is time for a new movement, a new dance to inform our language and rhythm in approaching authentic mission-church relations.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study was designed to provide an understanding of a specific phenomenon. Its results may not be generalizable due to the nature of the sample. A major limitation of the study was the inability to include the voices of those from the residential child caring facility. Priest (2007) states, “It is believed that North American Christians need to hear the voices of Latin American Christian leaders on the topic of short-term missions” (p. 14). Therefore, a suggested area for future research would be to include the voices of hosts and of those this trip intends to serve each year as this addition would help discern the outcomes this specific trip has on the lives of those at the residential child caring facility.

Another limitation to this study was the timing in which participants were interviewed for this study. Participants were interviewed either during the trip or within three weeks immediately following their return. Some answers may have been reflected while experiencing, what some may define, as a spiritual high. Ver Beek (2006) interviewed short-term mission participants to Honduras and their perception of the trip’s outcomes; a limitation he concludes from his study

correlates, “I interviewed the returning participants immediately after returning from their trips- while they were still on the ‘high’ from their experience” (p. 479). Would interviewing participants three to six months after the trip produce different perceptions? This could be an area for future research. Another area for future research could be to study more in depth if this trip produces lasting change in participants and if so what are those changes? If lasting change is not produced in participants, how can the sending congregation begin to foster an experience that would create lasting change?

Conclusion

Core social work values imply that we indeed have a legitimate role in teaching, exemplifying, and advocating for this new dance, a dance that no longer crushes, a dance that embraces mutuality, a dance that creates a world where “sharing rather than acquiring becomes the organizing principles of the economy” (Lee, 2002, p. 581). Imagination is an appropriate place to end. Imagine “a world in which God’s people, i.e. the human community, can learn to dwell together with a reverence for one another, with the courage to ask hard questions, with the willingness to shatter false images, and with the freedom to imagine the future” (Lee, 2002, p. 581).

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Appendix A: Research Instruments

Interview Questions

- 1) What made you decide to participate in this short-term mission trip to Guatemala?
- 2) How many times have you participated on this trip?
- 3) What factors influenced you to participate only once/ more than once on this trip?
- 4) What did you feel your team achieved as a result of this trip?
- 5) In what ways is this trip important in the life of your congregation?
- 6) What differences did you notice this trip make in the lives of those who participated?
- 7) What differences did you notice this trip make in the lives of those at the residential child caring facility?
- 8) What changes happened as a result of this trip? (This change could be both personal and collective)
- 9) Now that the trip is over, how was your trip either successful or unsuccessful?
- 10) What did this trip mean to you?
- 11) If you could add or take away an element either prior to going or during what would that be?
- 12) Are there any other comments, questions or insights regarding this trip that you would like to share with me?

Survey Questions

This is a brief survey to gauge your perceptions of outcomes of the short-term mission trip to Guatemala. This survey should take approximately twenty minutes to complete. Please answer the following questions by circling one response that indicates your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. Work quickly and record your first reaction to each item.

Demographic Questions

- 1) How many short-term mission trips have you participated in including this current trip?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4+

- 2) Age
 - a. 13-17
 - b. 18-29
 - c. 30-45
 - d. 46-59
 - e. 60+

- 3) Gender
 - a. Female
 - b. Male

Survey Questions

1. Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. My culture should be the role model for other cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. People from other cultures act strange when they come to my culture.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. Other cultures should try to be more like my culture.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. I am not interested in the values and customs of other cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
7. People in my culture could learn a lot from people in other cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
8. Most people from other cultures just don't know what's good for them.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
9. I respect the values and customs of other cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
10. Other cultures are smart to look up to our culture.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
11. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
12. I have many friends from different cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
13. People in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
14. Lifestyles in other cultures are not as valid as those in my culture.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
15. I am very interested in the values and customs of other cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
16. I apply my values when judging people who are different.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
17. I see people who are similar to me as virtuous.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
18. I do not cooperate with people who are different.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
19. Most people in my culture just don't know what is good for them.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree
20. I do not trust people who are different.
Strongly Disagree Disagree NeutralAgree Strongly Agree

21. I dislike interacting with people from different cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
22. I have little respect for the values and customs of other cultures.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
23. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
24. I like to own things that impress people.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
25. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
26. I like a lot of luxury in my life.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
27. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
28. I am content with what I currently possess.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
29. I would be happier if I could afford to buy more things.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
30. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
31. I'd rather spend time buying things than doing almost anything else.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
32. I would be more content if I had more money.
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

¹ Survey used with permission from Dr. Dennis Horton at Baylor University.

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