



## Short term outreach projects

Short-term outreach projects are an important part of the church's mission. These short-term projects contribute to the sustainability of the church's missional activity, but also offer opportunities for team members to be part of God's mission and for them to experience how lives are changed. Sadly, it also creates a space in which many mistakes are made because of a lack of knowledge. This pamphlet aims to help prevent these mistakes and to give guidance in making the best use of the opportunity.

### **Why outreach?**

The cover of Charles Elliott's book, *Comfortable Compassion?*, depicts a man sitting in a comfortable armchair while he watches scenes of famine at the time in Ethiopia.

This picture emphasizes the great divide between believers witnessing the spiritual and physical needs of the world, and the people who have these needs. Too many times this picture of the man in the armchair also portrays the picture of our own involvement.

To pray for people or send them money from the comfort of our meeting halls, churches and lounges while we watch the visuals and listen to the reports, weakens our mission calling. The Lord has far more in mind for us than armchair outreach actions.

### **Personal contact and relationships is the key to our outreach projects**

Visits and short-term outreach actions are an absolute necessity. Only personal contact can build relationships and ensure that the Lord changes both parties. Outreach is not a one-sided activity. Many of the testimonies we hear, tell of people whose lives changed when they became personally involved with people in spiritual and physical need.

Short-term outreach actions and visits to projects inspire both the visitors and the hosts. It is not only reaching out to faraway places that can change people. Outreach in our own environment offers equally good opportunities to do more than armchair outreach and to build relationships with people. We are giving the opportunity to pray for people with names and faces, and who are in situations we can understand a little better. We also get a chance to realize how much we can receive by opening up ourselves just a little.

It is actually quite simple. When God saw that the world is in need, he did not try to fix things from a distance from his high

throne. He walked on the dusty roads of Palestine himself. That is the example we want to follow. If we do this, it opens our eyes to the wonderful discovery that the living God still works in the world. This discovery inspires us and for many it is a life changing experience.

### **Locally and abroad**

There is so much need locally – then why do we still need to do outreach abroad?

- Acts 1:8 explains clearly that we must share the gospel locally, but also to the ends of the earth. We must never ignore local need. Believers have various opportunities to be involved in local outreach. The gospel is available in abundance, but in comparison to that abundance, the need in lesser-reached areas is great. If we do not become involved there, who will?
- These outreach efforts are usually more expensive, but it is difficult to put a price on opportunities to bring the good news of the gospel to the people who have not been reached. The criticism about foreign outreach is often unfair. The Lord places the need of the unreached on the hearts of people. It is unfair to criticize foreign outreach if you are not even involved locally yourself.

### **Go on invitation**

Short-term outreach projects happen on invitation from the church or community where outreach is being done.

- Good discussions in advance can lead to an invitation, not only from the missionary or mission worker, but also from the local church. If there were no pre-existing relationships, it would be good for leadership to visit first.
- This invitation should ideally be in writing and should explain the expectations of the local church and staff.
- The stated expectations will form part of the outreach goal as outlined by the outreach leadership and approved by the congregation.
- The following needs to be agreed upon with the host congregation: What will the team do? Accommodation? Food and travel arrangements? Costs involved and who takes responsibility for these costs? The maximum and minimum size of the team?

### **Outreach goals**

- Apart from very specific needs, the following should serve as outreach goals:
- Serve the church and missionaries (and other staff) to whom we are reaching out and support them in their long-term work.
- Encourage believers and leaders.
- Contribute to spreading the gospel.
- Expose outreach members to the existing spiritual and physical need and mobilise them to be involved on a longer-term basis.
- Create awareness in the sending congregation of the long-term actions they are involved with and of the existing opportunities to become involved as individuals.
- We go to serve and to learn.
- Be realistic about the expectation of each other and of the outreach.

### **Outreach leaders**

- The sending congregation appoints the outreach leaders team. This team has at least a team leader, a spiritual leader and a logistics/administrative leader.
- They take responsibility for the outreach, including finalising the programme, putting together the team and devising a strategy for the recruitment of members.
- They do research about other possible organisations and churches involved with the outreach target and inquire about possible partnerships for the outreach
- They do research about the local circumstances, people, culture, and etcetera.

- Good financial planning and management is necessary. Outreach programmes operate at great expense and are often criticised for that.

### **Make-up of the team**

- The goal of the outreach and the circumstances of the receivers of the outreach / local church determine the make-up and size of the team.
- Prospective outreach participants must apply for a place on the team and must be screened and selected. Involvement in an outreach is not a suitable way of healing emotional wounds. Requirements regarding physical challenges also need to be taken into account.

### **Preparation of the team**

- Attendance of preparation session is a prerequisite.
- Physical, emotional and spiritual preparation is needed.
- Offer proper training and practical skills that might be needed according to the planned activities.
- Base preparation on the culture and background of the community targeted for the outreach.
- Give practical guidelines for the type of clothing to pack.
- Everyone needs to sign indemnity forms and they must have medical insurance.
- Prayer supporters play an important role.
- Fundraising also serves as an awareness campaign for the project.
- An outreach opportunity in the church involves the congregation.

### **The host church and staff**

- Outreach actions place extra pressure on the hosting missionary staff and church. Their role is to receive a group of guests and to guide them through their programme. They are often very tired after such an outreach. On the other hand, the visit to them also blesses them and supports them in their work. They feel revived because of the team's effort to visit them. Such an outreach team also becomes ambassadors for the project afterwards. Therefore, outreach actions should not be an irritation to the local missionaries, but an important part of their work.
- It is extremely important that especially the team leaders are culturally sensitive during cross-cultural outreach events. They need to show respect for the local culture, be humble and wise. Good preparation by knowledgeable people and thorough continuous self-reflection is a necessity.
- Apart from the physically visible traditions and taboos, negotiations, decision making and expectations can be especially challenging for leadership when cultural differences are involved.
- Serve on their terms. Relationships are more important than "what we are doing today".
- Concentrate on listening and not speaking prematurely or out of turn.

### **Material divide and expectations**

- Understand the influence of gifts and money on relationships. Outreach participants are seen as wealthy and a possible source of money and gifts. This perception influences relationships.
- Finances are probably one of the greatest stress factors that can put pressure on the relationship between the outreach team and the local congregation.
- Be very careful about making promises of help and gifts or collections among the team for local workers.
- The ownership of projects, buildings and apparatus must be clearly agreed upon beforehand.

### **Practical work**

- Language can be a hurdle and therefore good interpreters are a prerequisite in such situations.
- Work with the local believers.

- Eat together – it is part of building relationships.
- Be aware of possible health risks to visitors – e.g. water that has not been boiled.
- Respect the local view on the use of alcohol.
- Insure that you know what type of clothing and actions might be socially unacceptable to the local community.
- Learning words and phrases in the local language will show respect for the local people and their culture. You are there to serve them – not to tell them how bad they are.
- Depending on the local circumstances, it is better to stay with the community and not in a hotel, a guesthouse or with the missionaries. Create opportunities for the team to be able to withdraw as a team at intervals.
- Allow room in the programme for the spiritual programme and the guidance of the outreach team as well.
- Planning for good follow-up is important when the team does evangelisation. God works and can do wonders. But God also wants us to use our common sense. God can use a Bible or pamphlet that you distribute or a Jesus film that you show, but following a hit and run approach without plans to follow-up, is not effective.
- Focus on relationships with people – rather than building projects – especially when the team members are not specialists. You can often find very good local artisans.
- Respect the local traditional, political and administrative leadership.
- Spirits, demons, witchcraft, dreams, lucky charms or numbers often play an important role in some communities.
- Try not to let your “brave” or confrontational actions upset the people of other beliefs in the area in such a way that the local believers and remaining missionaries have to suffer because of it after you have left.

#### **After the outreach**

- Be sensitive to the return to the “reality” after the intensive spiritual outreach experiences. It is necessary to have a debriefing period at the end of the outreach, ideally not in the same place where the outreach took place.
- Give good feedback to the congregation and supporters – not about the difficult journey and difficulties, but about how God worked in and through the team.
- Keep in contact. Thanks to especially cell phones, contact can often be kept and relationships with the local believers can be strengthened further.

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