

**I'M IN THE  
LORD'S  
ARMY**

**Short-Term Mission Trips  
for Elementary Students**

BY JUDY L. SHULL

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## *How can we help our students to see beyond materialism and put Christianity into practice?*

**H**ow can we help our students to see beyond materialism? How can we help them to put Christianity into practice? How do we educate them for future careers? Christian teachers face these questions on a daily basis.

In an effort to help my students experience Christianity in action, I arranged for my four seventh-graders to join me on a 10-day Maranatha church-building project in the Dominican Republic.

Our conference superintendent of education was in charge of this trip. Joining him were the four seventh graders, an eighth grader, and five academy students. Adults responsible for the students included two parents, two grandparents, an academy Bible teacher, and myself. In addition, three women and 10 men came from various parts of the state. The complete group totaled 15 men, five women, and 10 students.

A mission trip such as this costs money. How can 12- and 13-year-olds earn more than \$600? The school's home and school association voted to give each student \$100 for the trip. The students raised the remainder of the money from various sources. Several of the students were sponsored wholly or in part by relatives. Others raised money through part-time jobs such as lawn mowing.

One student organized a one-man bike-a-thon and convinced his neighbors to sponsor him for a dime or a nickel a mile that he rode his bike one Sunday. He earned \$50 through this effort.

**O**ne family held yard sales to contribute to the trip fund. The members of their small church helped as well. One student contacted his father's employer. The teacher and the student then were asked to write

letters explaining what the trip involved and its benefits to the young man and his local community. One hundred dollars arrived from this source.

**A**fter hearing about the mission trip, one child's grandmother told the youngster's mother, "I've been wanting to do something for your son. I've done something for all the other grandchildren. Your youngest has been a subject of prayer for me." The next day, she sent a check for \$100.

Preparation for the trip was integrated into the curriculum. One student bought an English-Spanish dictionary. Another student checked out Spanish language tapes from the public library. As their teacher, I tried in various ways to create an interest in the Dominican Republic. We worked hard to get two weeks ahead in our school work. However, rather than worrying about what my students would miss while they were out of the classroom, I concentrated on the benefits of a short-term mission trip. I knew such a trip would give them a little exposure to how much of the rest of the world lived.

### **Expanding the Curriculum**

A mission trip can be used to expand the classroom curriculum. In religion classes, we emphasize the joy

of giving. Here is a real, hands-on, giving activity to which students can apply their talents and see immediate results. The joy of being needed and helping others will help them to make positive decisions in the future.

As educators, we often hear that Americans are unwilling to learn a foreign language. But by immersing themselves in another culture and language, students sense a need to expand their own horizons and learn a second language. They also experience a better understanding of their native language as they try to decipher the various road signs, comparing the Spanish words to English.

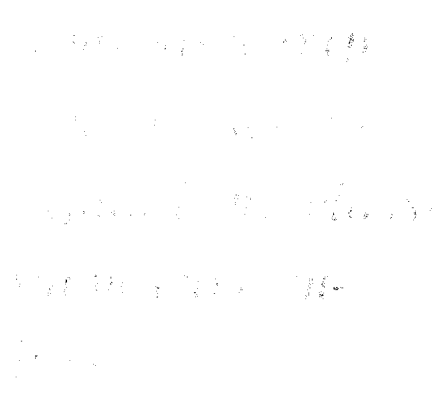
Teaching about choices is an important part of preparing students for the future. But nothing in the classroom comes close to the practical experience of learning how to mix mortar, trying to set a block in a wall, or assembling scaffolding. On a mission trip, students may get to help an electrician, a carpenter, or a concrete finisher. Their experiences may include how to fasten on a roof or prepare meals for 30 people. They may spend some time with a local pastor and see how his numerous duties differ from those of a pastor at home. Students will come to better understand and appreciate the job of an interpreter.

**I**n social studies and geography classes, teachers are often frustrated because their students lack a clear perspective on the size of the world. A number of students have never left their home state or province. Air flight gives students a bird's eye view of their country and a better understanding of its size. As they watch the land forms far below, they see the patchwork patterns of farm lands, roads from the country to the sprawling suburbs, and the busy activity of the cities. My students were excited to see the Statue of Liberty from the air and to spot New York Harbor and the ships traveling in it.

Flying over the ocean gives students some idea of the distance the early explorers covered and lets them see how the water color varies in different parts of the ocean.

The destination country itself will be an experience for young people who have never before left their native land. They will be surprised to see chickens in the road and narrow streets where the bus almost touches the buildings on each side. They may ride on divided highways paved with dirt and see donkeys in the median. In the open-air markets, they will see people negotiate on prices and food wrapped in big leaves. The houses will be made of bare concrete block with no glass in the window openings.

A short-term mission trip will also teach young people the value of math as they use it in "real life" story problems. Some examples include calculating air speed and arrival times, figuring out time zones, and measuring materials on the construction site. Students can help calculate where to place a block line or window and door openings. At the marketplace, they need to compare the cost of items to those at home and make change using local currency. At times, they may need to figure out the exchange rate. After they return to their classroom,



they will better understand the purpose of story problems.

### Organizing the Chores

Making sure that the students were involved in an integral way and felt needed did prove to be a challenge. Most of the students were not accustomed to heavy manual work. The unskilled jobs on the site were limited. In the Dominican Republic, the neighbor children were quick to anticipate what needed to be done and jumped in to do much of the unskilled work.

In order to keep the students involved, I suggest a schedule similar to this: Two children help the cooks with breakfast preparations. After the meal, the building workers go to the job site, while two students stay behind and help clean up the kitchen. After scrubbing pots and pans, these students have a couple of hours to rest or play before they have to help prepare lunch. During this time, trips can be taken to the market for food, and students will enjoy this adventure. When lunch is ready, they can help the cooks take the meal to the job site and serve the

food. These two students and perhaps one of the cooks can stay at the job site and work through the afternoon. Other students who have been on the site all morning can return to the kitchen with the cook and a new adult assistant. These students do the lunch clean-up. They then get time to clean up and to rest or play until time for supper preparations. After supper, they help with clean-up. This gives them a break from the heavy labor of the job site and a chance to rest.

It seems best for younger children to spend a maximum of about three hours each day working hard at the job site. While kitchen duty is not easy, at least it is familiar to most children, and they can have a sense of confidence about the required tasks. This plan allows the children some resting and playing time.

Young people can do a number of things on a job site. Plan the schedule and specific assignments by talking to the job superintendent before the trip. Students can shovel and sift sand for mortar. They can push a wheelbarrow and supply mud to the block layers. Students can move blocks at the site and hand them to the masons. They can run errands around the site. After the walls start going up, one student can be kept busy with the scaffolding. They can help with painting and staining. In general, students volunteering for a mission trip need to be willing to do whatever needs to be done, even if it is picking up trash on the site.

Children can also help present a story hour for the neighborhood children. Perhaps there are one or two adults who could be in charge. The students who go to the job site in the morning could help the adults present stories during the first hour, before everyone gets too sweaty. After the story hour, the presenters can work on the job site until noon. The crew bringing the lunch could present an afternoon story hour after everyone finishes eating. The beauti-

pupils in the Dominican Republic.

ful felts from Sabbath schools at home are captivating to children in developing countries who have never seen anything like them. The stories will need to be told in a simple way, since many of the children will be unfamiliar with most Bible stories.

Often, the morning and afternoon programs can involve different children because the country will have a morning and afternoon school session, as in the Dominican Republic. Check ahead of time to see how the local school program operates.

Americans are a big attraction to neighborhood children. They love to come and see these strange people and find out what they are doing. To advertise a story hour, talk to the local church members. The ladies will let their neighbors know and may even help with singing and storytelling.

#### **Guidelines for Participants**

Set boundaries ahead of time. Make sure the students, their parents, and job supervisors know specifically what is expected of everyone. Children should know who they are to obey and to whom they are responsible. Parents should reinforce this understanding with the child in front of the teacher and others who are also taking part in the trip. Parents need to support the teacher or other adults who are taking the responsibility for the child.

**S**tress to students before going on the trip that they must treat others with respect, even if they don't feel like it. Neglecting this area could ruin the trip for everyone involved. Discuss with the students the need to cooperate, even if the job isn't fun, and follow directions, even if they don't understand the reason. With these understandings in place ahead of time, the mission experience will be far more rewarding for all.

#### **What to Take**

As in all trips, you generally realize what you need after you get there, so here is a wish list for future reference.

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Bring plenty of sun screen and sun block. Put it on all the time. You will probably be closer to the equator than usual and the sun's rays are much more intense. Have each student bring several hats for protection from the sun. Explore in advance the availability of safe drinking water and food. Bring your own if necessary. Take plenty of medicine for stomach and intestinal problems and check what immunizations are recommended.

One suggestion the students laughed at before going but wished they'd listened to was to obtain clothes from the Community Services center to wear in the foreign country. Before returning, they could leave those clothes for the people who needed them. We found that the nationals seemed to really like T-shirts with pictures and writing.

Local children will visit the site each day, seeking to help and to make friends. Hard candy, doled out sparingly, will provide a special treat for them. Coloring books and crayons or markers make a nice gift for the local SDA school.

#### **After You Return . . .**

After returning home, the students will need a little "down time" to rest and share their adventure with their family. Then they will be ready to present reports to the school and church. A vesper program at the local church and other area churches is a nice way to share what they have done.

If you feel impressed to participate in a short-term mission trip with young teenagers, these words from Ellen G. White will be encouraging:

*In order that the work may go forward in all its branches, God calls for youthful vigor, zeal, and courage. He has chosen the youth to aid in the advancement of His cause. To plan with clear mind and execute with courageous hand demands fresh, uncrippled energies. Young men and women are invited to give God the strength of their youth, that through the exercise of their powers, through keen thought and vigorous action, they may bring glory to Him and salvation to their fellow men (Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 535). ❧*

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