

A Philosophy of Short-Term Mission

Introduction

The following is Cornerstone's philosophy of Short-Term Mission (STM). The purpose of this document is to describe Cornerstone's heart and perspective on STM, in order that aspiring participants may be better informed and equipped in their future journey. The document will also serve to articulate various criteria that Cornerstone will use to identify which types of STM we will be eager to support. The document contains two major sections: (1) a descriptive list of principles that we will use to identify STM that are aligned with Cornerstone's mission, and (2) a summary of recent research on the effectiveness of STM. We have also included an appendix, which identifies the biblical basis for STM. But first, we must articulate three preliminary thoughts regarding Cornerstone's Global Ministry.

Preliminary Statement

First, Cornerstone church considers its global mission as an extension of our local mission. Its focus and philosophy on cross-cultural missions is not constructed independent of its local mission, even though cross-cultural ministry will present its own unique challenges (see below). The same principles, therefore, that drive Cornerstone to reach Simi Valley, LA and Ventura Counties, are driving their Global Ministry philosophy in general, and Short Term Mission in particular.

Second, our Short Term Mission trips that we support will fall within the boundaries of our *Cornerstone Partnership Assessment Criteria*, which is captured under the three criteria:

1. Local Church Partnership
2. Evangelism and Discipleship
3. Leadership development

All ministries of STM will also fall under these criteria. For a development of these criteria, please see Appendix B.

Third, we at Cornerstone will use a different label to describe what is popularly known as “Short Term Mission Trips.” While “Short Term” is inherent in the journey, “Mission” never is. God has been on a mission to reach the nations ever since he promised to bless “all the nations” through Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18). God later invited Israel and then the church to partake in this mission—*His* mission—to be a light to the nations (Exod 19:4-6; Isa 49:6; cf. Gal 3:8) and make disciples of all peoples (Matt 28:19-20). Labeling our short-term trips as short-term *missions*, therefore, could convey something unbiblical, that we can switch the “mission light” on for a couple weeks and then switch it off again. We therefore have found the name “short term mission” to be an inadequate label for such journeys.

Among the various labels we could use in the place of “Short Term Mission,” the one that the Global Ministry Team has proposed is *Cross-Cultural Ministry Trips* (CCMT). Each term here captures the essence of what we are trying to do in these excursions:

- *Cross-Cultural*—It has often been assumed that a “missions trip,” or “missions” in general, is something that happens somewhere south of the border or across the ocean. But as stated above, God is on a mission *everywhere* to reach all peoples. Therefore, we find it best to replace *mission* with *cross-cultural* since this better captures the unique feature of the short-term journey. The difference is not that the participant is *now* on a mission; rather, he is now, for a short period of time, focusing on a ministry outside of his own cultural context. The participant’s mission began when he received the Holy Spirit, not when he ventures overseas.
- *Ministry*—This term also replaces what was formerly communicated by the term *mission*. We believe (and the research shows) that such trips should be submissive to the needs and leadership of the host churches and missionaries. The term *mission*, though, has sometimes given off the air that we are coming to accomplish our plans, our goals, our programs—we are coming to help *you*. The term *ministry*, which simply means *service*, better captures our intention. We are coming first and foremost to serve: the host church, the missionary, and the global community that we are visiting.

Abandoning the “short term” lingo may help enhance a more “long term” relationship with our host churches—something we should be aiming for (more below). Changing the terms will not necessarily enhance the quality, but it will better capture our intention in these trips.

Principles for Effective Short-Term Ministry

The following 9 principles govern the ethos, method, and mission of Cornerstone’s CCMTs. These principles were shaped by much recent research by missiologists and sociologists that examined the benefits and problems of American short-term mission trips over the last 20 years. The result of this research has been summarized on pages 6-20 after the following principles.

1. Doing ministry “glocally”

The first principle corresponds with the preliminary thoughts above. Cornerstone believes that its global outreach is an extension of, and thus not independent of, its local outreach. Therefore, the first pre-requisite for doing missions cross-culturally is that the person must be doing missions locally. Certainly, some people are more cut out for cross-cultural ministry, in light of upbringing, language skills, adaptability, or simply a particular heart that beats for the nations. But the same God that causes one’s heart to beat for cross-cultural ministry is probably also causing that same heart to beat, to some extent, in his or her local community. Since God is on a mission to create disciples *everywhere*, we too, if we are going to join Him in His mission, need to be engaged in what He is doing all around us.

2. Education and preparation.

Many of the problems created by previous CCMT could be avoided through necessary education and preparation. This concerns not just facts about the host country, but intricate issues related to culture, worldview, poverty, and the long-term mission, which

we are serving. Preparation also includes a sober analysis of the purpose and goal of the trip, including the potential positive *and negative* effects such a trip may have on the host church or missionary. In short, preparation and education is vital for the long-term benefits that STM is seeking to produce.

3. CCMT is primarily *for them*, not *for us*.

The primary reason for CCMT needs to be for the lasting benefit of the host church/missionary and *their* long-term mission, and not for the potential spiritual effects it may (or may not) have on the participants. Like spiritual gifts, which are for the edification of *others* (1 Cor 12, 14), CCMT's are trips of service that should focus primarily on the benefits given, not received. While participants may enjoy life-changing experiences, these must not be the *primary* reason for engaging in a CCMT.

4. The needs should be determined by our hosts.

CCMT leaders and participants need to be intentional about letting the host churches/missionaries determine the extent, nature, and details of the trip. Cornerstone desires to support CCMTs that have been initiated by the host ministries. We cannot assume that national churches need or want an American team for a short time unless, of course, they ask for one. Moreover, if we have been invited, we cannot assume that we know the solution to their problems, or the best way to further their mission. CCMTs supported by Cornerstone will let *them* tell *us* what their needs are. Another way to articulate this principle is in terms of doing ministry "with" versus "to" or "for" our hosts.

5. CCMT should foster long-term relationships

Cornerstone places a high value on building and maintaining relationships with our partners (missionaries, indigenous ministries/churches, etc.) in other cultures. Because of this, our goal is that all CCMTs endorsed by Cornerstone will make relationships a priority. But the short-term nature of these trips presents obvious barriers to long-term

relationships. Therefore, CCMT leaders and participants need to be very intentional in this area. At the very least, we need to be educated (point # 1) concerning the value of relationships and conduct our trips accordingly. We could also foster long-term relationships through long-term follow up after the CCMT. This may be maintained by the nationals and the CCMT participants, or simply carried on by the host missionary, who maintains the relationship initiated by the CCMT.¹ In any case, establishing and strengthening relationships will be kept at the forefront of all CCMTs.

6. Priority of long-term CCMT

The most effective CCMTs sent out from Cornerstone will be those that in some way are part of a more long-term ministry. This may take the form of multiple (yearly, bi-yearly, quarterly, etc.) CCMTs to the same location/ministry, or CCMTs sent to aid cross-cultural partners with Cornerstone—those with whom Cornerstone will have a long-term relationship. Aspiring CCMT participants should understand this, and, perhaps, seek to participate in such a trip that has a more long-term connection with Cornerstone.

7. Participants should contribute at least a portion of the cost

Typically, aspiring CCMT participants will raise financial support for the trip through support letters to friends and family. Cornerstone encourages this, along with garnering support from your community group. Along with these avenues of support, Cornerstone encourages the participant to contribute to the cost of the trip. Giving financially to the trip will help the participant to value the CCMT, to take more ownership of it and enjoy the blessings that accompany sacrificial giving.

8. CCMTs should not look for immediate, quantifiable results

¹ This point was made by Jeff Atherstone.

Since we live in a production oriented consumer culture, it is pressing for us to “get as much done as we can” while we are on our journey. However, this is reflective of our culture and other cultures aren’t structured like this. In many other cultures, relationships are valued much more than production, and as stated above, we believe that our CCMTs should foster relationships, no matter the explicit task we are engaging in. Research has shown that many CCMTs that did produce quantifiable results did not benefit the hosts in the long run; in turn, some CCMTs that spent much time simply getting to know our missionaries/host churches actually achieved much more in terms of helping *their* long-term mission.

Summary

These 8 principles have been formed in light of recent research on short-term mission trips. The following is a summary of the significant results gleaned from this research.

Research on Short-Term Mission Trips

The Short-Term Missions movement has exploded over the past two decades. In 1989, 120,000 American Christians ventured on a Short Term Mission (STM) trip.² This increased to 450,000 in 1998, 1 million 2003, and 2.2 million in 2006.³ At an average cost of \$1,500 per trip, this amounts to about 3.3 billion dollars that the church spends on STM per year. And they *are* short. Ninety-two percent of all STMs are for less than 60 days; more than half are for less than two weeks.⁴

STMs generally received much positive press from our churches and sending agencies. Potential negative effects of these trips are rarely considered; the massive spiritual benefits they have on participants are simply assumed. However, recent research

² For the following discussion, we will use the phrase Short-Term Mission and the acronym STM throughout, rather than our own CCMT, since this is the phrase/acronym used by the researchers.

³ Roger Peterson, quoted in Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor, and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 161.

⁴ Robert J. Priest and Joseph Paul Priest, “They See Everything, and Understand Nothing: Short Term Mission and Service Learning,” *Missiology* (2006), 56.

by missiologists and sociologists has revealed some shocking truths about the overall effectiveness of these trips.⁵ In previous years, churches relied on the self-perception of enthusiastic participants fresh off the plane to measure the spiritual benefits of the trip, both for the host church and the participants. But recent studies show that these perceptions do not often lead to lasting change or concrete action on the part of the participants, nor do they prove that host churches experienced a positive impact for their long-term ministry from the STM. What is needed is not a wholesale abandonment of STM; rather, the church needs to think more critically about how to engage in STM in a way that is beneficial for both the host and participant. To be clear: Cornerstone is *not* against STMs. We are *for* STMs that are done rightly, and only against those STMs that hinder the long-term mission.

Global Christianity

Perhaps the best way to set the stage for the effectiveness of STMs is to recognize the rather remarkable growth of global Christianity in the last century. It is shocking, yet informative, that the center of gravity of the Christian Church no longer resides in the West. It is in the South (Africa and Latin America), and to some extent in the East. Just to get a feel for the size and fervency of the global church, here are a few quick facts:⁶

- None of the 50 largest churches in the world are in North America.
- For every 2 missionaries that come into Nigeria, 5 *Nigerian* missionaries are sent out. There are currently over 3,700 Nigerian missionaries serving in 50 countries.
- 20,000 people convert to Christianity in Africa, 28,000 in China, 35,000 in Latin America—*every day*.
- 40% of South Korea is Christian.

⁵ Missiologists have largely focused their studies on the ministries of so-called career missionaries. Most studies on STM appeared after 1990.

⁶ The following facts are from Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*, 31-42, and Jenkins, *The New Christendom*, 3-9.

- Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world, with a 6.9% growth rate (compared to 2.7% for Muslims). Most of this growth is happening in the Majority World (or “Third World”).
- By the year 2050, only 1/5 of the world’s Christians will be non-Hispanic whites.
- By 2050, there will be an estimated 1 billion Pentecostals in the world, making it the most successful social organization in the past century. Most of these will live in the southern hemisphere (Latin America and Africa).

These snapshot facts should reshape the way we think of STMs and missions in general. As missionaries to the non-Western world, we need to keep in perspective the fact that many places where we are sending our STMs are more “reached” than the West! Churches have been established, missionaries (from non-Western nations) are being sent out, and while the form of Christianity may look different than our version in the West—for better or worse—we need not give lip service to the fact that we can learn from them; indeed, we *need* to learn from them and see ourselves as learners, servants, and partners as we *come alongside* the global church in *its* mission.⁷

With this in mind, we will now move to examine the results of recent research that has been done to measure the effectiveness of STM. It is important to understand that the following research is the product of *missionaries* and others in the field who have simply asked lots of questions and documented answers.

Summary of Recent Research on Short-Term Mission Trips

There has been quite a bit of recent research done on STM, measuring the positive and negative effects of these trips, both on the participants and the host churches. The research has exposed some shocking truths about STM, which are summarized below under four headings.

⁷ Livermore, *Serving*, 37.

1. *Short Term Mission trips do not usually produce long-term positive change in the lives of the participants.*

The primary reason that Americans promote STM is usually aimed at the spiritual benefit such a trip will have on the participant. Shockingly, however, research shows that the lasting benefits that STM has on its participants is not what we have assumed.⁸

First, Christians have assumed that taking a STM will increase the likelihood that the participants will end up as career missionaries. But such is not the case: while there has been a dramatic increase in STM participants over the last two decades, the number of career missionaries has stayed the same.⁹ If STM participants are more likely to become career missionaries, then the number of career missionaries should have increased along with the enormous increase of STM participants. But it hasn't. Moreover, the recent boom in STMs has sapped the pool of "missionary funds" from many churches, thus decreasing the church's ability to support career missionaries. Much of the church's money given toward missions is re-directed to short-termers. This has probably led to the longer time it has been taking for aspiring career missionaries to raise support.¹⁰ Therefore, while STM participants usually come back with a *desire* to pursue missions full-time, the numbers show that such desire does not often turn into a reality. We should not count on STM to be a springboard, launching career missionaries into the field.

Second, many have believed that taking an STM will increase the participants' future financial contribution to missions, even if he or she does not become a career missionary. But again, research has proved otherwise. For instance, Missiologist Robert J. Priest performed a meticulous study documenting this claim. He concludes:

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the data, see Robert J. Priest, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," *Missiology* 34 (2006), 431-50; David A. Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 52-55.

⁹ For instance, one pole examining 690 Protestant mission agencies indicating that there were around 40,000 career missionaries and 60,000 short-term missionaries in 1996. In 2001, the number of short-termers increased to about 350,000 (almost a 600% increase) while the number of career missionaries stayed the same. For a detailed analysis of the data, see Priest, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement," 432.

¹⁰ See Priest, et al., "Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement, 438.

No methodologically sound research we have discovered has yet demonstrated a significant average increase in giving by participants caused by STM experience. In short, one claim about STM, that it helps to create higher levels of financial support for the career missionary enterprise, does not appear to be true.¹¹

Likewise, Christian sociologist Kurt Ver Beek analyzed several STMs to Honduras, and while many participants said they desired to increase their giving to missions, the documented evidence proved otherwise.¹² Again, like so many other self-reports, the desire for spiritual growth was evident, but there was no lasting change in behavior among participants.

Third, we have assumed that taking a STM trip will end up reducing materialism and ethnocentricity in the participant. But according to research, this has not always been the case. While participants usually come home struck by the grinding poverty in the majority world and make all sorts of commitments to live on less and give more, there is no evidence that participants in STMs were any less materialistic than their homebound neighbors. “Those with extensive STM experience were fully as materialistic as those with none.”¹³ Likewise, ethnocentricity remains the same in the long run among those who engage in cross-cultural ministry through an STM. Participants may be impressed by certain characteristics of the nationals, but at the end of the day, they are quite thankful they aren’t one of them.¹⁴ Some studies have shown that there actually may be an increase in ethnocentricity among participants. David Maclure notes that STMs often “perpetuate the very things they’re intended to counter. Participants come home assuming poor people are doing just fine and are happy that way” and are often a bit annoyed at the weird, backward

¹¹ Priest, et al., “Researching the Short-Term Mission Movement,” 439-440.

¹² Ver Beek, “The Impact of Short Term Missions,” *Missiology* (2006), 485-86.

¹³ Priest, et al., “Researching,” 440. David Livermore agrees. He notes that a “growing number of researchers question the long-term impact of short-term trips upon participants. Some studies demonstrate that while participants come home with lofty aspirations of buying less, praying more, and sharing Christ more, within six to eight weeks, most resort back to all the same assumptions and behaviors they had prior to the trip” (Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*, 54, 105-7; cf. Linhart, “Curricular Nature;” Kurt ver Beek, “The impact of Short-Term Missions. A Case Study: House Construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch”).

¹⁴ See David Livermore, “AmeriCAN or AmericAN’T? A Critical Analysis of Western Training to the World,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 40; Kurt Ver Beek, “The Impact of Short-Term Missions: A Case Study of House Construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch;” idem, “Lessons from a Sapling: Review of Quantitative Research on Short-Term Mission” in *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing it Right!* (ed. by Robert Priest, William Carey Library), pp. 469-496.

ways of doing things overseas. “Instead of advancing the cause of mission, the exercise simply reinforces worn stereotypes and old power relations.”¹⁵

The data is overwhelming: while STM does elicit *good intentions* for spiritual growth, there is little evidence that they have produced lasting change. Such change is better attained through long-term, not short-term, engagement in cross-cultural ministry.¹⁶

Admittedly, though, positive spiritual change in the participant is difficult to measure. So we need to be cautious and allow some immeasurable change to take place. However, regardless of whether or not STMs produce positive change in the participant, we need to engage in STM *primarily* for those to whom we are seeking to minister, not for the potential benefit it may (or may not) have on us. The very “missions for me” mentality reveals more of our American consumer mindset than the “others-centered” mindset of Christ. Ministry, in whatever form, is primarily for others.¹⁷ Thus, even if the research above was reversed, we still need to ask the question, “What lasting benefit do STMs have on national churches,” rather than assuming that the spiritual benefit on the participants *in itself* is worth the cost of the trip. Instead of a “missions for me” mentality, we need to be driven by a “missions for them” one. STMs should be trips of service and partnership. We are to help them in their (the missionary and national) on-going mission, the mission that will continue long after we leave.

2. *STM participants often have a wrong self-perception about their reception by the nationals*

Since American churches are exploding with wealth, education, and technology, it is commonplace that we feel we have something great to offer those less fortunate in the world. Again, there may be some truth to this. But assuming so much power and giftedness can foster ethnocentricity, and may produce a “god-complex” in the helper, while ensuring

¹⁵ Livermore, *Serving*, 54, citing Maclure, “Wholly Available? Missionary Motivation where Consumer Choice Reigns,” <http://www.williamcarey.org.uk/FILES/essay1.htm>. William Carey, 2001.

¹⁶ Of course, some spiritual benefits are impossible to measure. For instance, Francis Chan went on a short-term trip to Uganda a few years back, and the impact that this had on him was life changing. Given his platform to reach thousands of people, his life changing experience has effected many thousands of Christians. All of this, though, is difficult to measure.

¹⁷ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 172

perpetual shame in the one who is always being helped.¹⁸ This of course does not mean that we don't offer help to those in need, but it does mean that we need to offer the right kind of help in the right kind of way, otherwise we may actually hurt both us and the ones we are seeking to help.¹⁹

Theologically, the idea that all people are created in God's image (Gen 1:26-28) wars against any preconceived notion of superiority. All people by virtue of their *humanness* have amazing, God-given abilities that need to be harnessed and fostered, not supplanted and overlooked. Therefore, as stated above, STMs do not always need to be on the helping/teaching/education end; rather, we should seek to partner—indeed, *learn from*—our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The American church does have great wealth. No research can deny this. But we need to question whether our wealth and skill is actually what the churches of the majority world need. Take for example the results of STMs that focus on teaching. It has been common for educated Americans to venture out on 1-2 week teaching trips to teach indigenous pastors. Missiologist David Livermore decided to do a study on such a trip, considering both the self-perception of the American teachers *and* the honest evaluation of the students. Here are some quotes from the American STM teachers:²⁰

- “They were really hungry [for the training].”
- “The training [was] outstanding...I think they were hungry, very hungry. I would even say more hungry overseas than they are here...because they're looking for more effective ways and tools”
- “They would sit and listen. They wouldn't get up and go to the bathroom every five minutes or say, 'I need a break' every couple hours. They were enduring heat...humidity...the small environment...And they didn't get up and leave. I mean

¹⁸ A “god complex” is “a subtle and unconscious sense of superiority in which we believe that they have achieved our wealth through our efforts and that we have been anointed to decide what is best for low-income people, whom we view as inferior to ourselves” (Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 65).

¹⁹ This is the basic thesis of Corbett and Fikkert's recent book, *When Helping Hurts*.

²⁰ Livermore, *Serving*, 72. The following quotes are from *Serving*, 72-73. T.J. Smith, a missionary in India, has also testified to similar teaching experiences in his context.

they were spellbound...in listening to the message, the methodology...the format...the how to's and the philosophy.”

- “It was fresh and new [like] they had never heard it before. They really soaked it in.”
- “They were so thirsty. They just hung on every word.”

While this is one isolated incident, it is very typical of the self-perception of such short-term education trips. But self-perception can be deceiving. Now consider some responses from the indigenous students of the *same training session*:

- “You conclude you’re communicating effectively because we’re paying attention when we’re actually just intrigued by watching your foreign behavior.”
- “It was a nice day, but I don’t think what they taught would ever work here. But if it makes them feel like they can help us in ways beyond supporting our ministry financially, we’re willing to listen to their ideas.”
- “I’m glad the trainers felt respected. They should. What they need to realize, however, is that we would never think about talking or getting up to leave in the middle of their lecture. It would be repulsive to do that to a teacher in our culture.”
- “I wish we could have shared more about the real challenges we’re facing in our ministry. How do I lead a church when most of our godly men have lost their lives in battle? How do I help a parent care for their AIDS baby? Those are my pressing issues, not growing my church bigger or starting a second service. I didn’t get that whole discussion.”

Self-perception can be quite deceiving. The Americans didn’t understand, for instance, that respect for one’s teacher and his lecture is a *cultural* matter, and this does not necessarily mean that they were dying of thirst for our American wisdom. The lesson that can be learned from this example is this: the actual benefit of our STMs should be determined by those whom we are serving, not by the participants.

Now, to be sure, this is only one negative example. Surely many other positive encounters on both ends could be reported. However, these “other sides to the story” have

largely gone unnoticed and should at least cause us to venture into such settings more prepared. We need to be informed about the potential limitations of STM teaching trips in order for us to maximize them and use them to produce positive results among the host churches.²¹

The fallacy that majority world churches need our wisdom and talent can also be seen in the area of building projects. These have been a widespread bone of contention among missiologists, economists, and national hosts that receive such trips. While there have been some blessings channeled through building homes, churches, hospitals, and other such structures, there have been many unseen curses, certainly not intended by the participants.²²

For instance, Jo Ann VenEngen, a sociologist in Honduras, has observed some negative effects of STMs that spend a great deal of money to come and do the work that could have been done by the nationals. On one such Spring-break excursion, an American group “spent their time and money painting and cleaning the orphanage.” But the “money could have paid two Honduran painters who desperately needed the work, with enough left over to hire four new teachers, build a new dormitory, and provide each child with new clothes.”²³ It is striking that virtually all of the positive reports of STMs come from the participants’ *self-perception*, not from the national host churches.²⁴ The few studies that have been done, in which the nationals themselves are interviewed, have turned up some negative and quite embarrassing truths. While the nationals often appreciate the thought

²¹ Some of the limitations of STM teaching trips can be overcome by longer exposure in the culture—something inherently limited by STM. Studies have shown that STM that are longer than 8 weeks gain a very different view and understanding of the culture. It takes a few months for the novelty of the culture to wear off and honest communication with the nationals to take place (Livermore, *Serving*).

²² One unseen curse has to do with the unintended effects that bringing outside resources (material, labor, etc.) has on the local economy. We do not live in an economic vacuum, and neither do our national hosts. We need to at least ask the question whether our building projects are *hindering* local business owners, thus presenting a very bad witness for the gospel to the very mission field that our hosts are trying to reach (cf. Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 115).

²³ VanEngen, “The Cost of Short-Term Missions,” 21

²⁴ Ver Beek notes: “It is very distressing that only two of 44 STM studies to date include data on those who receive STM trips. While this trend is beginning to change, we need more high quality research regarding the lasting impact of STM on the receiving communities.” (Ver Beek, “Lessons from a Sapling,” 13).

and effort, American building ventures often bring unforeseen long-term harm—felt only by the nationals after the Americans leave.²⁵

Oftentimes, nationals who are invited to “help us” in our building project are made to feel in the way, or worse, simply incompetent.²⁶ Our ignorance and ethnocentricity shines bright when we truly don’t think that *they* know what they are doing. Instead of doing things for the nationals, we need to genuinely and authentically work with them in their ministry. As David Livermore states:

Local ownership means more than inviting participation or asking for input. It means letting the local churches actually direct and shape what we do in our cross-cultural efforts; they ask *us* if we want to be involved rather than vice versa.²⁷

We also need to find out if our STM building trips will have a negative effect on local businesses. Economies don’t exist in a vacuum, and bringing in outside labor and supplies may actually have a negative effect on the local communities. An indigenous construction firm struggling for work, for instance, may not be delighted to see a group of Americans coming in and taking their jobs—which is how some STMs may be seen from their perspective. This doesn’t preclude the benefits of STM building trips altogether. It does mean, however, that we need to ask some broader questions about the overall benefit of the trip, without just assuming that our materials and labor will be a great blessing on everyone. And the potential spiritual benefit that such trips *may* have on the participants cannot be pursued at the expense of the long-term negative effects they may have on the nationals.

In short, we need to be more intentional at learning not determining the needs of nationals.

3. Cross-cultural differences produce significant barriers to effective ministry

²⁵ Kurt Ver Beek, “The Impact of Short-Term Missions: A Case Study of House Construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch.”

²⁶ See Livermore, *Serving*, 95.

²⁷ Livermore, *Serving*, 94.

This fact plays out in too many areas to list. Here are only a few:

Communication. American evangelicals care very much about the message we are proclaiming and how we, the messengers, understand it, and yet historically we haven't been nearly as sensitive to how the receiver of that message understands it. Being more "receptor-oriented" in our communication will cause us to constantly question whether our *intended* message is being understood. But this evaluation necessitates a deep understanding of the receptor's culture and worldview, not to mention his or her language. Being in a culture for a very short period of time, therefore, hinders "receptor-oriented" communication.

Desire for Social Capital. When nationals express a great amount of enthusiasm for STMs from western countries, their intentions may be good, but they also may be fueled by a desire for social capital.²⁸ Social capital refers to the *potential economic and social gains that are made through networking with those of a higher social standing*. Why is it that nationals may flock to a conference put on by westerners, yet scarcely show up if one is put on by their own leaders? It is not uncommon for nationals, especially of the majority world, to respond in remarkably positive ways to an evangelical event put on by westerners, only to conjure up the same response to, say, a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness event put on by westerners the following week! Again, we have to be very cautious about drawing hasty conclusions about how we are initially received by those of the majority world in our STM.

Ignorance of Subtle Cultural Differences. We live in an age of global commerce and media, where it is not uncommon to see a teenager in Manila wearing Levi jeans, an Abercrombie shirt, Nike tennis shoes, an LA Dodgers baseball cap, with an iPod screwed into his ears pumping the latest Coldplay album. On the surface, people from other cultures may look and even act the same, causing us to let down our culture-sensitive guard. But we need to be aware that there are vast differences between the West and the South or East, differences that often take a long time to see and appreciate. For instance, there is a big

²⁸ This was pointed out to me by my former colleague and missiologist, Dr. Don Gigorinko of Cedarville University.

difference between cultures that run on “clock time” (or “monochromic”) vs. “event time” (or “polychromic”). A “clock time” culture, like the US, is driven by the clock: events begin and end at a certain time. The birthday party, for instance, will be from 12pm-2pm. But in an “event time” culture (e.g. Brazil, Mexico, Israel, India), the event begins when the people show up and ends when they decide to leave—which may be 2am, rather than 2pm! Other cultural differences such as the level of individualism, power distance, and high/low context, may be hard to understand in a short amount of time but can greatly hinder ministry without even knowing it.²⁹

Many of these subtle cultural differences can be overcome through long-term ministry. However, STMs can still be effective *if they are prepared with the necessary training*. This is absolutely essential; it cannot be stressed enough. Aspiring participants in STM should spend an extensive amount of time in learning the customs, worldview, culture, history, politics, psychology, and religion of the cross-cultural context in which he or she is seeking to minister. Such education will maximize the benefits that the trip can have on the recipients of the trip.

4. *STM has often failed in building or fostering relationships with those whom we are serving*

Probably the biggest difference between America and most other cultures in the world is that we are more production oriented while other cultures are more relationship oriented. Just look at some of our proverbs:³⁰

- “time is money”
- “better sooner than later”
- “make every minute count”
- “the early bird gets the worm”

²⁹ For a thorough and practical description of all these things, see Livermore, *Serving With Eyes Wide Open*, 113-128; Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 162-64.

³⁰ Livermore, *Serving With Eyes Wide Open*, 62-64, 95-96, 118-119.

For many Americans, long conversations and unplanned engagements with people (especially with ones we don't know, or like!) can be quite burdensome. But other cultures are often different. Relationships are central and time is their servant, not master. And research has shown that this has been one of the greatest weaknesses of American STMs: they often don't foster long-term relationships with indigenous believers.

This has been a near unanimous conclusion from the research. Kurt Ver Beek surveyed all the studies done on STM in the last 20 years and found that:

STM groups need to do everything possible to ensure that they are partnering with organizations, missionaries, churches, etc... who are involved in excellent, life-changing long-term work with those they serve. While the STM trip may be a catalyst or detractor from the intended changes—it is the long-term excellent relationships are the ones which will most contribute to creating lasting positive change.³¹

David Livermore came to the same conclusion after interviewing many nationals who have hosted STM trips. In one interview with a Rwandan church who received an STM to help with a building project, told the group that 90% of their work was done the minute they got off the plane. The group was shocked, since they hadn't *done* anything yet. But the nationals said: "You're here. Your presence speaks volumes." The fact is, "The presence and chance for *relationship* together seemed to be the most pressing need for the Rwandan church beyond any menial tasks that were planned."³²

The value of relationships cannot be overstated. In fact, Christian economists Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert conclude that building relationships is the single most important thing to do to alleviate poverty! As good capitalists, we often misdiagnose the cause of poverty as lack of stuff. So our solution to poverty is to give the poor more stuff. But this isn't the solution, since lack of material resources often is not the *primary* problem.³³ "North American Christians need to overcome the materialism of Western culture and see

³¹ Ver Beek, "Lessons from a Sapling."

³² Livermore, *Serving With Eyes Wide Open*, 95-96.

³³ Except, of course, in situations where immediate "relief" is needed (e.g. the hurricane in Haiti).

poverty in more relational terms.”³⁴ The root causes of poverty often have to do with more complex issues than simply lacking material things. After studying the root causes of poverty, Corbett and Fikkert conclude:

While poor people mention having a lack of material things, they tend to describe their condition in far more psychological and social terms than our North American audiences. Poor people typically talk in terms of shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation, and voicelessness.³⁵

These root issues can only be overcome through relationships with the poor.

In short, STMs need to see their purpose more in terms of fostering long-term relationships. This can be done in a variety of ways. STM can support career missionaries in their relationships to the nationals; it can help the relationship between the missionary and sending church; or it can build relationships directly with the nationals, provided that the length of the relationship outlasts the length of the trip!

Conclusion

Much research has been done to evaluate the long-term benefits of STMs. This summary has focused on some of the more negative aspects of that research in order to help us think more critically about how we can best engage in STM. Despite some of these negative results, STMs can be beneficial if done correctly. For this reason, all STMs (=CCMTs) supported by Cornerstone will be governed by the principles listed at the beginning of this philosophy, which are based on the research just examined. Again, Cornerstone sees value in CCMTs, as long as they are done rightly.

³⁴ Livermore, *Serving With Eyes Wide Open*, 95-96.

³⁵ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 53.

Appendix 1: Biblical Foundation for Cross-Cultural Ministry Trips

Are there any examples of believers who were called to serve in a cross-cultural context for a short period of time? Indeed, there are several. We should understand, however, that the early church began under the Roman Empire, which comprised a conglomeration of various cultures and sub-cultures. Thus, the cross-cultural element of these short-term trips will not be completely analogous to our own context. (Ministry within America, where there are various cultures living within one political entity, is probably closer in form to the early Roman Empire.) Nevertheless, we do find several examples of ministry trips that were quite brief in nature.

Paul's letter to the Philippians records an interesting scenario concerning Epaphroditus, a member of the recently established Philippian church, who was sent by the Philippians to minister to Paul. We know from the end of Acts that Paul ended up in prison in Rome (Acts 28:16-31). While there, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Paul in prison to give financial help, encouragement, and assistance in ministry (Phil 2:25-30; 4:16-18). While there, Epaphroditus got sick and almost died "for the work of Christ" (Phil 2:27, 30). Paul then sends him back to the Philippians and praises his courage, telling the church to "receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard" (Phil 2:29).

We don't know the details of Epaphroditus' ministry trip, other than that it was short, life threatening, and profitable for Paul's ministry. No correct method can be gleaned from this passage, but it does show at least one positive example of a CCMT.

Another example of someone who engaged in CCMT was Luke, the author of Luke-Acts. We know from the so-called "we" passages in Acts that Luke accompanied Paul on portions of his missionary journeys (See Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). We don't know exactly what Luke did or why he accompanied Paul only for short periods of time, but we do know that the trips were not long-term and that Paul saw some benefit in the journeys. Again, this does not help in developing a particular method of CCMT, but is simply another example of a CCMT that was validated by the Apostle Paul.

Timothy, Paul's "true child in the faith" (1 Tim 1:2), was instructed to visit Paul (in prison?) quickly (2 Tim 4:9) in order to bring his cloak and some books and parchments (2

Tim 4:13). No doubt Paul also wanted some encouragement from Timothy before he died.³⁶ Timothy was also expected to visit the Corinthians in order to “[do] the Lord’s work” (1 Cor 16:10-11). While the details of these trips are not clear, the need for them can be assumed.

When Paul wrote letters, he sent them by way of one of his companions. When the bearer of the letter arrived at the church, he or she would read the letter to the congregation, inform the church about Paul’s whereabouts, and most likely minister to (and be ministered by) the church in whatever capacity needed. Some of these letter carriers include Pheobe (Rom 16:1-3), Tychicus (Eph 6:21-22), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30; 4:18). In some ways, these were mailmen (and women); but for Paul, they were more than that. They were ministers of the gospel entrusted for a particular mission, which would have been inherently short. The carrier would then probably return to the sender with a letter, or some information, from the people he just visited. While their main purpose was delivering a letter, their personal presence represented, to some extent, the presence of the sender (see e.g. Phil 2:30). This mission cannot be duplicated today by simply mailing a letter or sending an email. A CCMT with the purpose of encouraging a missionary and helping with ministry would be closer in form to ministry performed by these letter carriers.

The book of Acts records many people who engaged in a particular ministry for a short period of time, including Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Barnabas (see Acts 13:1-3), Silas (e.g. Acts 16:19, 25), and Apollos (Acts 18:24-28; 19:1; cf. 1 Cor 16:12). Paul himself, of course, traveled around the Mediterranean world establishing churches and encouraging disciples, and he hardly stayed anywhere very long.³⁷ But Paul was commissioned as an apostle with a very unique mission in redemptive history. So we need to be cautious in using his ministry to validate modern CCMT. But Paul had many traveling companions who helped him in his ministry in ways that correspond more closely to modern CCMT.

In summary, the Bible does not exhibit any particular method or an explicit list of principles for Cross Cultural Ministry Trips. What it does do, however, is reveal that many early Christians engaged in ministry outside their local context for a short period of time.

³⁶ Paul was probably near death when he wrote 2 Timothy (see 2 Tim 4:6-8).

³⁷ His longest stay was his two years in Ephesus (19:10); his shortest was his three weeks in Thessalonica (17:2).

Therefore, we find biblical basis for doing the same, even if we must use our God-given wisdom and experience to help shape our thinking regarding the best method we should use to go about this.

Appendix: 2

Cornerstone Partnership Assessment Criteria

We have identified three main areas of ministry in which, we believe, each partnership should be evaluated. By having one or more of the three elements in place, it helps us to better appraise our existing partnerships and those we will embrace in the future according to God's vision for Cornerstone.

The following is a brief statement and description of each of these criteria:

1. Local Church Partnership

In any of our partnerships with individuals, churches, sending agencies and organizations—they must have a clear emphasis on planting new churches or coming alongside the local church in their effort.

The priority of the local church can be seen in many ways in the New Testament. For example, Jesus Christ Himself promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18). It is important to consider the fact that He promised to give success to the building of His church and not some other organization. This does not mean that He will not bless other organizations but that what He has promised to build is His church. Since this is the case, we want to invest in what the Lord has promised to build and develop partnerships with those who make it a priority to build His church around the world.

We can also see this priority of the local church in the ministries of the apostles in the New Testament. The apostles established churches, visited them to strengthen them and wrote to the churches to teach, encourage and build them up (e.g., Acts 14:23,27; 15:41; 20:17,28; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

Because of the clear emphasis on the local church in the New Testament, we seek partnerships with individuals and ministries that directly invest in the local church by planting churches, strengthening churches, assisting the church in Gospel presentation and in effectively training leaders for the church.

2. Evangelism and Discipleship

We want to partner with individuals and ministries that are focused on presenting the Gospel in their communities, cities, etc.; maintaining both a local and global outreach perspective.

Central to the Great Commission is the making of disciples, which starts with sharing the Gospel (Mat. 28:19). This Gospel witness includes both a local and

global perspective. These two aspects can be seen in Acts 1:8, “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria (local perspective) and to the end of the earth” (global perspective). The twofold aspect is also seen in Luke 24:47, “and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations (global) beginning from Jerusalem” (local). The global aspect is emphasized in Matthew 28:19, “Make disciples of *all nations*.”

Individuals and ministries that focus on presenting the Gospel in their communities should naturally be developing and instilling within those who become disciples a global outreach perspective. In other words, those who become followers of Christ should be instructed regarding their biblical responsibility to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission’s global aspect of making disciples of “all nations.”

An important, but often neglected, aspect of Gospel presentation is the incorporation of new believers into the local church. The Great Commission teaches that we should “make disciples.” Many times evangelism takes place without any kind of follow-up or discipleship. A truly biblical evangelistic ministry should include the presentation of the Gospel *and* a strategy for the incorporation of the new believer into a local body where he may be encouraged, edified, instructed, become a part of the community of believers and exercise his spiritual gift for the greater edification of the body.

3. Leadership Development

It is important that our partners clearly see the need to develop spiritual leaders that will continue with the mission of presenting the Gospel, leadership development, and church planting.

In most places in the developing world there are very few opportunities for pastors or those who are called to be pastors to get the training they need to be effective, biblical leaders. These leaders need someone to help them gain a better understanding of Scripture and how to interpret it so that they will have a ministry that is Christ-centered and biblical. For the churches they lead or plant to be biblical and effective in reaching their communities, it is essential for the leaders to be trained so that they can lead the people to live out the Gospel biblically on a day to day basis as well as help them grow in their knowledge of God and His Word.

Therefore, it is important to follow Paul’s advice to Timothy when he says, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Those who are called to pastor or be missionaries need to be able to rightly interpret and teach God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15) and have a good understanding of sound doctrine so that they will be able to teach it and refute those who contradict (Tit. 1:9).

