

# Wise Counsel



## **a pastor's perspective on mission teams serving with his church**

*Each summer our church hosts youth groups who come to do mission work in our inner-city neighborhood. I have hosted about thirty groups. Often we get to see excellent mission teams used by God to make eternal impacts in lives. For these teams, churches like ours will be forever grateful. They are not only great helpers, they are great encouragers to congregations that could use some support. Sometimes, though, groups are less successful. As you prepare for your service opportunity, I would like to share some thoughts from the perspective of one who is on the receiving end of teams like yours.*

### **• Communication**

First and foremost, talk about everything with the church you will be working with. Who will provide supplies for the activities? Is there a place to store and cook lunch? Absolutely every detail about which you have a question is much more easily handled with a one-minute phone call before the service date than with panic at the last minute!

### **• Check out the Situation**

While not always possible, the groups that have positive times of service are often the ones who visit the site before the ministry day. This usually takes care of the unpleasant surprises. The incoming church is able to see first-hand where and with what they will be working. Sometimes they have taken photos or videos to show the folks back home what to expect. They also gain a greater vision and excitement for the mission that they pass on to the rest of the group. It's just easier for both sending and receiving churches to communicate expectations clearly and make sure all details are thought through when they are meeting face to face. When the ministry day arrives, supplies are ready, preparations have been made and misunderstandings avoided.

### **• Be Flexible**

Some detail (maybe even a "large" detail) will slip by. The most effective mission teams and leaders we have seen have been the most flexible and humble. Look at the potential hardship as a great story in the making! The week will easily recover from not having snacks for Bible clubs on the first day, for example. It may not recover from angry outbursts or subtle resentment that seeps into the rest of the team.

### **• Be Humble**

Be slow as molasses in giving the church you are working with advice, unless they ask for it. Remember, outreach techniques that work in your church may not be effective in another community. Try to remain respectful of the knowledge and experience of your host. You may feel you have a fresh idea to "solve" their "problems." You may know little of the culture, the people, or the history of the church. They may feel that your few hours in their neighborhood hardly earns you the right to offer advice.

### **• Be Considerate**

Many inner-city pastors may very well be the secretary and the janitor for their congregations. He may also have to hold down another job to support his family. He probably won't be able to drop all other commitments to assist in everything your group does.

- **Be Prepared (with food)**

Call it coincidence, but often the groups that have the warmest fellowship have brought cooks who see their role as a real ministry. Part of this may have to do with a ministry-minded focus in the whole group. But part of it is the simple fact that volunteers who have delicious, nutritious meals have better attitudes, and they feel better physically. Meaningful encouragement and unwinding can occur over these home-cooked meals. (Let me offer an aside here. If possible and appropriate, bring extra food to share. There may be a helper or two from the church you're working with that you'd like to eat with you. Also, there may be kids or teens from the neighborhood who will attach themselves to your group. I have seen our inner-city teens learn so much just from sitting at a table sharing a meal with a visiting team.)

- **Bring Good Leaders**

Teams really take on the personality of their leaders. If a leader comes in as a servant, a "learner" and a hard worker, the rest of the volunteers do, too. Therefore, make sure your leaders have servant hearts. Be careful not to set a negative example of complaining, being lazy, getting angry when something does not go as planned, or belittling your host church.

- **Be Spiritually Prepared**

With outstanding groups we often hear of many weeks of spiritual preparation. For example, if you are going to be sharing the gospel in a neighborhood that is racially different from your own, it would be wise to begin discussing prejudices and cultural sensitivity. Bible studies related to being a servant are crucial. When this foundation has been laid, it seems to be much easier to motivate volunteers who are tired and hot and far from the comforts of home.

- **Follow Through**

It is disappointing to have groups that do not stay through to the end of a project. For example, if you help with a block party, be prepared to stay until the very last table is moved inside and the very last piece of trash is picked up. Nothing gives a bad reputation like a group that comes in to sing their musical then gets on the bus while the church members are left with a huge mess to clean up. Whatever project you do, make sure you do it right, and leave the place cleaner than you found it.

Let God lead in your planning and preparation. I hope these words will be helpful as you prepare your team for a life-changing experience.