



Notes for Group Leaders

Dear Group Leader,

We are looking forward to welcoming your group home to Bethlehem Farm. Thank you for all the work you are doing to prepare your group for this experience.

Based on the requests and helpful tips of previous group leaders, we have compiled a set of pre-trip meeting formats for your use. We realize that getting your group to commit and assemble for four meetings before the trip may be an ambitious goal, so the meetings are designed to stand alone if necessary. Even gathering for the first meeting format alone could be a great start for your group and help prepare their hearts and minds for their service-retreat experience at Bethlehem Farm.

Here are some tips that may be helpful as you consider using these pre-trip resources:

- Use as many or as few meeting formats as is suitable for your group. Each meeting can stand alone while also contributing to the whole preparation process suggested by the four meetings.
- Use as much of the information as is appropriate for your group and your timeline. For example, if your students cover Catholic Social Teaching in-depth as part of their courses, then you can skip that part in favor of other segments.
- All documents have been prepared as .pdfs, but Word documents can be supplied by request if that is more helpful to you.
- Note that the pre-trip meetings include topics for reflection, rather than logistical preparation. Please utilize the other pages of our website for participant forms, group leader checklist, packing lists, and directions.

Thanks and we'll see you soon,
Colleen Fitts
Catechetical Coordinator

Excerpts from

Short-term Service, Long-term Impact

By Katie Mulembe, Coordinator of Recruitment and Alumni Relations

Short-term service can be one of the most influential experiences in a person's life. Within our Network, the majority (68.5 percent) of those engaged in short-term service, both domestically and internationally, are under the age of twenty-five. Often participating in a trip through their school or church, these young adults have the opportunity to open their eyes to cultures and life experiences quite different from their own. This means that, at a time when they are making big decisions about their careers and lifestyles, they are also encountering the poor in a very personal way. If done well, these transformative service experiences can help direct a person's life path and mold their social consciousness. Many of these individuals will go on to pursue long-term volunteer and mission programs and serve in important ministry roles in their church and community. As program staff, there is much we can do to support the lifelong impact of short-term service – on both those who serve and the communities they visit.

Build community at home. Lasting relationships are vital to maintaining the depth of the service experience. The primary community will be formed within the group of volunteers who serve together. As much as possible, the group should begin fostering these relationships before they depart for the trip. A strong community will form when the group has the opportunity to have fun together and connect on a personal level. While on the trip, a group that has a pre-established level of trust will be willing to share more openly during reflection sessions, thereby enhancing the impact of the experience. After the group has returned home, the strong bonds can help provide accountability and ongoing reflection.

Foster personal reflection. People have varying reasons for wanting to participate in short-term service. “I want to make a difference” or “I want to give back” are two very common motives. Through quiet time and prayer, many will uncover their deeper and much more personal intentions. Fears and anxieties may also come to the surface, but that is a good thing because it allows volunteers to begin to ask themselves important questions about their lives even before they arrive at the service site. It is always better to address these emotions before departure rather than during the service trip.

Develop good listening skills. The projects completed during a short-term service experience usually meet an immediate need, but the quick results do not necessarily have a long-term impact. Instead, stories have the potential to remain for a lifetime. The greatest success in short-term mission programs often takes place once the volunteers return home and begin to share the stories of the people they met along the way. If volunteers enter the experience hoping to learn from the people they meet, they will carry a spirit of humility and be more open to the unexpected ways that God is calling them to serve.

Small gestures like learning basic greetings, dressing respectfully, and sharing a simple smile can go a long way to help volunteers build trust with the people they meet. When volunteers are mindful of these local customs, they will find doors opening to them that might have otherwise remained closed. With this also come more opportunities for rich conversations that bring a deeper insight to the culture and life experiences of their hosts.

Published on *Catholic Volunteer Network* (<https://catholicvolunteernetwork.org>)

Source URL: <https://catholicvolunteernetwork.org/short-term-service-long-term-impact>