

Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church **Mission Trip Policy**

1. Purpose: To establish a simple process for planning a mission trip at Mt. Pisgah UMC.
2. Scope: All mission trips sponsored or supported by the church.
3. Background: Mt Pisgah UMC would like to ensure that all mission trips supported by the congregation are consistent with the ministry objectives of the United Methodist Church and that all money management decisions adhere to tax laws and good stewardship.

(A) MISSION TRIP PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Branches wishing to organize a church-sponsored mission trip should choose trips according to the following priorities. In evaluating proposed trips, the sponsoring branch will:

- Seek mission opportunities through the United Methodist Church. Partnerships with other US-based ministry organizations¹ may also be considered.
- Seek mission opportunities that are consistent with the mission of the United Methodist Church.
- Sponsor only those trips which allow the church to retain discretion and oversight in key areas such as:
 - Selection of the partnering organization
 - Selection of and training trip participants
 - Appropriate insurance and liability protection
 - Funding and financial planning for the trip
- Select mission opportunities that make effective use of our limited resources for the benefit of those we seek to serve. Preference mission opportunities that provide sustainable benefits.
- Not approve trip itineraries that include significant elements of personal pleasure, recreation or vacation. (Per IRS regulations)
- Establish qualifications for trip participation that are well defined and reasonable. The proposed process for selecting participants must assure that all church members who are willing and qualified have a fair opportunity for participation.

(B) INTERPERSONAL SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Foreign trips must be organized through the United Methodist Church or a U.S.-based ministry organization [501c3]. The church should not directly coordinate a mission trip with, nor provide direct financial support to, any foreign organization because our church does not have the resources to execute the necessary due diligence.

Mission teams should focus on spiritual considerations when planning and preparing participants for their mission trip:

- Cultural Sensitivity: Team members will be representing Mt. Pisgah UMC and the Body of Christ to those they serve. Expect things to be radically different from home. Effort should be made to research the new culture. Cultures are different, not superior or inferior.
- Teamwork: God should be lifted up in all that is done, radiating Christ's love by action, attitude and words. Each member is expected to be cooperative and courteous, working with a positive and enthusiastic attitude. Support fellow team members and recognize the unique contributions of each team member.
- Personal: Be open to the work of the Holy Spirit as you prepare for the journey and while you are serving. Be willing to grow and expand your own horizons. Refrain from negativism and complaining when unexpected and undesired circumstances occur in travel and ministry.

(C) NON-SPONSORED MISSION TRIPS

Sometimes members of our church family respond to a personal call to mission by planning or participating in their own mission trips. Such trips cannot be treated as "sponsored" by Mt. Pisgah UMC since the church does not exercise discretion and oversight over them.

Participants in trips sponsored by organizations other than Mt. Pisgah may appeal to the Mission Branch, or any other branch, for scholarship assistance. Any scholarship grant will be subject to approval, availability of funds and would be payable directly to the sponsoring organization.

Donations earmarked for mission trips organized outside the UMC must be sent directly to the sponsoring organization.

Appendix A

MISSION TRIP PROPOSAL

All church-sponsored mission trips must be organized through one of the church branches. Sometimes an individual or small group wants to participate on a mission team, or a branch may spark the initiative. In either case, someone must assemble and submit the following information to the respective branch for approval and support of the proposed mission trip.

- ▶ Name of the non-profit organization or charity with which the individual/group would be working if the trip is not coordinated through the UMC
- ▶ Mission of organization
- ▶ Financial annual report or other information referencing the organization's non-profit status
 - Name and email of contact/coordinator
 - Location: address, website
 - Dates of proposed trip
 - Estimated cost (travel, hotel/food, medical insurance and materials): total and per person
 - Number of team members and skill sets needed
 - Proposed fund raising plan
 - Recommendation for mission trip team leader and experience/training
 - Scope of proposed mission activities (construction, VBS, medical, disaster response, teaching, etc.) and proposed itinerary (including sightseeing/plan for days off)
 - Background: Why this? Why now?
 - Ways to involve the church congregation, including advertising and recruitment plan for team members (other than fund raising)
 - Orientation plan for team including cultural, geographical, social, and language training
 - ▲ Safety provisions
 - Basic first aid training for one or more team members
 - Plan in the event of a serious injury (ability to communicate to obtain assistance, knows how to contact local first responders, etc.)
 - Plan and equipment to deal with water and food safety
 - Compliance with child protection guidelines
 - Communication plan for assistance in the case of extreme emergency
 - Insurance information on all participants
 - Plan for a church presentation upon return from the trip to report on the journey, highlights, and accomplishments of the mission.

Appendix B

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

All mission trips involved in collecting and disbursing monies should follow these procedures to assure that we are good stewards of these funds.

- Upon approval of the mission trip, the church Finance Manager needs to be notified of the following and an internal account will be established:
 - Mission trip name
 - Key dates: departure, payment dates
 - Leader(s) and team member names (when available)
 - Approximate amount to be collected
 - Amount of funding, if any, the sponsoring branch has approved from their operating budget and/or designated funds
- Team fundraisers should be handled in accordance with Mt. Pisgah's Guidelines for fund raising. Cash and checks must be handled in a controlled manner and deposited promptly in the Treasurer's lockbox. Proceeds from sales of goods or services are never treated as tax-deductible contributions.
- Participants usually make/solicit donations to cover trip costs. These donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law if:
 - The donor did not receive goods or services in exchange for the donation; and
 - The donation is not "restricted" to a specific individual. Once a donation is accepted, it cannot be refunded if the specific individual does not participate in the trip.

A written acknowledgment to each donor will be provided by the Finance Manager for all mission trip donations.

- All disbursements for the mission trip must be approved by the sponsoring branch steward or one of the pastors. By approving the disbursement, the approver affirms that the expense is necessary and appropriate to the mission.
- All disbursements must be supported by third-party receipts or acknowledgments.
- In some cases, funds may be advanced to a participant prior to departure. Advances greater than \$250 must be approved by the Lead Pastor.
- If funds are advanced, the recipient must submit a prompt and complete summary of the use of the funds after returning from the trip. Expenses must be supported by individual receipts, and excess funds, if any, must be returned to the church.

Occasionally the church may be asked to provide donated funds to a foreign or domestic entity whose financial status is not verifiable (e.g. individual, church, NGO). The church will be unable to comply with such a request as it represents a violation of IRS guidelines.