

GETTING OUT OF TOWN

5 ways a mission trip can impact your church

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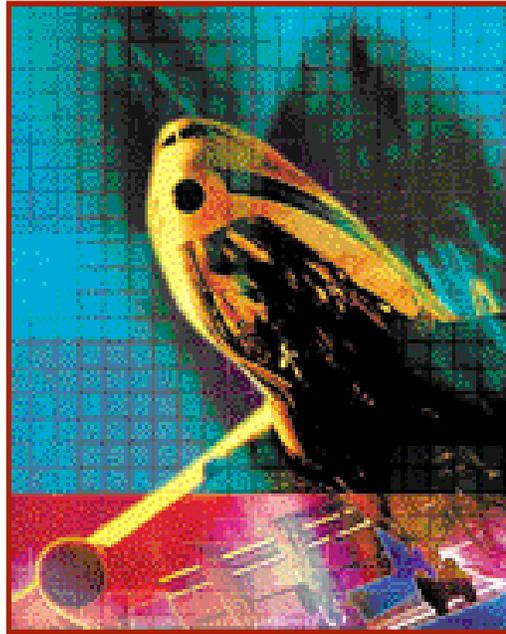
With all the roles a pastor has to play, I want to encourage you to play one more—travel agent. Yes, that's right. Serve as a travel agent by encouraging your church members to go on a trip this year—but don't just tell them to get out of town! Arrange for them to go on a mission trip to assist churches or missionaries in another town, state or country. Here are five reasons a mission trip will be a fulfilling, refreshing journey for your church family.

MEET THE FAMILY Many churches today rarely relate to other churches around them. But it's healthy for our local fellowships to have a kingdom mindset and to appreciate the fullness and diversity of the body of Christ. On our recent mission trip to Toronto, we worked with five new churches that were very different from us on the surface—and remarkably similar in the things that matter. One met in a movie theater, one in a sports center, one on a university campus, one in a high-rise apartment building and one in a Catholic school. But all of them loved Jesus. And they all came to feel like family. Our team returned home feeling more connected to the body of Christ and more appreciative of God's work around the world.

EXPERIENCE THE CULTURE On our trip to Toronto, we enjoyed learning about a new culture. We figured out the currency (how much is a toonie worth?), ate Vietnamese food in Kensington Market, debated theology with Muslims and tried to pronounce our words like Canadians (it's about, not about and soar-ee, not sorry). But we also started thinking about our own community. Experiencing a different culture causes us to look at our own with missionary eyes. How unreached is our town? What people groups and population segments live there? How can we share Christ with them in a "language" they

understand? Our church came back with a new commitment to understand the different cultures in our area so we may more effectively share the gospel where we live.

LEARN NEW SKILLS There's something about being away from home that gives you courage to try new things. When they're home in Georgia, our folks don't normally give out popsicles to university students, but they did it gladly in Canada. Also, they conducted spiritual surveys, spoke to moms in parks and gave out flowers to nurses at a local hospital. We were bolder in sharing and defending our faith and in loving perfect strangers with godly extravagance. Our mission team came home with a new resourcefulness and willingness to try new ways of reaching people.



TAKE YOUR TIME One of the best things about our trip was the time we had together to think and talk about our lives. Sure, we could have done that at church on Sunday morning, but we don't. And we could have done that on a retreat to the mountains. But being on a mission trip gave a new flavor to our conversation. We ended up talking about how we as individuals and as a church could fit into God's plan of redemption. And now all that talk is starting to turn into action.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS It was good for our church to meet some real dyed-in-the-wool missionaries. They came back with new heroes to emulate and a new spark in their eyes. They had seen people who are living out the adventure of a God-focused, missional life. Now they want to be that kind of people.

Our leadership team will meet soon to plan our next mission experience. I get to play travel agent again, one of my favorite pastoral roles. I can't wait for our next trip!