

Preparation for Travel and Cross-Cultural Experience

Our first task in approaching another people

Another culture

Another religion

Is to take off our shoes

For the place we are

Approaching is holy.

Else we may find ourselves

Treading on another's

Dream. More serious still,

We may forget

that God

was there before our arrival

Author unknown

Attitude Check

Not only is the experience of the poor often absent or inconsequential, the usual attitude is that it is the task or duty of the poor to change...to become like us. Ponder, however the litany written by a Two-Thursdays World bishop

WALK WITH US IN OUR SEARCH

Help us discover our own riches; don't judge us poor because we lack what you have.

Help us discover our chains; don't judge us slaves by the type of shackles you wear.

Be patient with us as a people; don't judge us backward simply because we don't follow your stride.

Be patient with our pace; don't judge us lazy simply because we can't follow your tempo.

Be patient with our symbols; don't judge us ignorant because we can't read your signs.

Be with us and proclaim the riches of your life which you can share with us.

Be with us and be open to what we can give.

Be with us as a companion who walks with us...neither behind nor in front...in our search for life and ultimately God!

A code of Ethics for Travelers

1. Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to learn more about the people of your host country.
2. Be sensitive to the feelings of other people, thus preventing what might be offensive behavior on your part. This applies to photography as well.
3. Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing.
4. Realize that often the people in the country you visit have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own; this does not make them inferior, only different.
5. Instead of looking for that beach paradise, discover the enrichment of seeing different way of life, through other eyes.
6. Acquaint yourself with local customs - people will help you.
7. Instead of the Western practice of knowing all the answers, cultivate the habit of asking questions.
8. If you really want your experiences to be a home away from home, it is foolish to waste money on traveling.
9. When you are shopping, remember that bargain you obtained was only possible because of the low wages paid to the maker.
10. Do not make promises to people in your host country unless you are certain you can carry them through.
11. Spend time reflecting on your daily experiences in an attempt to deepen your understanding.

If you're asked to help

Some suggestions about what to do when you are asked to provide assistance.

Do not be surprised or offended.

In Many cultures, it is not impolite to ask a new acquaintance for help or a gift. In all cultures, the giving and receiving of gifts follow certain traditions and customs. As a guest, you will not be aware of these traditions and will need some guidance.

Respond courteously without making any commitment at the time.

Do not promise something you cannot deliver, then or in the future, to get out of what may be for you an embarrassing situation. The person making the request probably does not expect an immediate positive response from you.

Furthermore, some conversation about the circumstance prompting the request may be in order with some general expression on your part of understanding and sympathy regarding the need. You may want to say that you would like to talk with some other persons about this - your group leader, some host church leaders, or a missionary.

Always consult with someone who knows the local situation well about any requests you may receive or any gifts you may be moved to give.

Visitors must be careful about selective generosity. A gift to a particular person, group, or congregation can create difficulties for local church leadership. Your home church may have an established relationship with the host church. Transfers of assistance in either direction probably are considered carefully and negotiated by the appropriate persons in both churches.

No matter how great the need may appear to be, do not let the impulse of the moment prompt you to offer assistance.

Your visit is not meant to be an occasion for establishing direct financial links between you or your group and a local individual, institution or congregation. What we may intend as a spontaneous expression of generosity on our part - we who have so much - may be demeaning to those who do not have our abundance. Your host, like most people in other cultures, will highly value your willingness to learn about them and understand them. An open friendly, and humble attitude will be more appreciated than a thoughtless display of your abundance. Again, it is always wise to seek advice from someone who knows the situation well.

Be aware that as a guest in a host church, you are the receiver, not the bearer, of gifts. Learn to accept hospitality and friendship of your host graciously. Be open to the many and various gifts they offer you - their insight into the Christian faith, their strength in adversity, their joy in living. Your willingness to receive what they have to offer you is highest compliment you can pay them.

The Gift of Partnership: Guidelines for Giving and Receiving

What you are about in this mission pilgrimage is far more significant than offering help to the Christians in Guatemala. Many people will have the idea that Christian mission, either short or long term, is a form of charity. It would be arrogant for us to believe that we could fix anything in Guatemala. God may choose to do that through someone who goes, if something indeed does need fixing but that kind of change only comes from God. Guatemala's problems are enormous, as are ours here in the United States, but changing anything that is causing those problems is for the Guatemalans to do. If you are going to change anything, it will likely be yourselves that are changed. You go to see with new eyes and hear with new ears. You go to learn, to give, to receive, and to celebrate the love God has given to all who are part of this WNC/SurOccidente/Suchitepequez partnership. You go as agents of mutual encouragement in the things of faith.

Each party in this Partnership has gifts which, when shared with the other, will enrich the life and witness of the other. Second Corinthians 8:13-15 is one key to understanding this. We in Western North Carolina stand in need of the Guatemalan Church's gifts of joy, faith, love, music, prayer, simplicity, and Spirit. The gifts we offer the church in Guatemala include administration, money, music, love, faith, and Spirit. The gospel calls us to build each other up...to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. In a quote attributed to an Australian Aboriginal woman, this idea is spoken well: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up mine, then let us work together." Our liberation and wholeness in Christ is bound up with that of the Guatemalans and with people throughout the world, including our own communities here in WNC.