Short-term mission (STM) is a movement that has been growing exponentially, especially in the United States: “Students, professionals, and retired people are traveling the globe to spend a week or a month building schools, painting homes, evangelizing, or providing medical care. According to the best estimates, the number of North American STM participants grew from 125,000 in 1989 to between 1 and 4 million in 2003” (Ver Beek 2006:477-478). Vílchez-Blancas estimates conservatively that around four million adult North Americans took part in North American STM in 2005, while another two million young people were involved during the same year in similar programs around the world, which adds up to six million North Americans taking part in STM programs in 2005 (Vílchez-Blancas 2007:160). What led to this incredible explosion of growth in short-term missions? Some of the answer is found in recent history.

**Short-Term Mission: A Short History**

Robert B. Kochtizsky decided to study theology in 1959. During the summer he looked for some missionary activity and went to the Philippines. The next summer he went to Bolivia. He was so enthusiastic about his experiences that he started the Laymen’s Overseas Service (LAOS) in 1962 after finishing his theology studies. By 1965...
this organization already had 150 volunteers working (Cosby 1966:931-932).

In 1966 Francis Stevens, president of LAOS, suggested that “ministers pay only lip service to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and they act as if they do not believe laymen have a specific witness to give and thus do not challenge them to offer their services. . . . The rapidly changing times sounded long ago the end of the [missionary] boards’ traditional ‘sending’ methods. We live in a day when one or two months of work donoted by a skilled professional may mean more to humanity than the service a permanent missionary appointee can offer” (Cosby 1966:932).

It seems, therefore, that the STM movement started as a reaction to conventional mission initiatives conducted by religious professionals and marked the beginning of an active participation of laypeople in direct worldwide missionary service. According to Paul Jeffrey, “People are not excited about sending their dollars off to faceless mission agencies; they want to become personally involved. Encouraged by the testimony of others who have had a life-changing experience in a Third World country, they want to ‘do mission’ themselves” (Jeffrey 2001:5).

The modern short-term mission movement started in the United States half a century ago but the Bible seems to indicate that this kind of effort was really started by the apostle Paul. “It may be worthwhile to examine Paul’s ministry for a precedent. A study of [the book of] Acts indicates that he spent a year or more in only three places: Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus (apart from involuntary imprisonment). One could count about a dozen places where he preached a few days or a few weeks, and departed—though later he certainly re-visited some churches and kept in contact with others through friends, by word-of-mouth, and by letters. In most places he visited, a church began” (Crawford 1997:338).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Short-Term Mission

Ken Walker says that some of the main arguments against the STM movement are an “alleging superficiality, cross-cultural ignorance, and poor stewardship of resources” (Walker 2003:30). In reaction to this a “coalition of evangelistic and missionary organizations has released a set of new Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission” (Walker 2003:30). These standards include: God-centeredness, empowering partnerships, mutual design, comprehensive administration, qualified leadership, appropriate training, and thorough follow-up. These patterns for excellence if followed would prevent much of the criticism presently aimed at STM (Standards 2009).

However, even in a brief review of STM literature it becomes clear that there are still some critics
of STM. Some of the problems involved in STM are described in *Contextualization of Mission: A Missiological Analysis of Short-Term Missions*, by Marcos Arroyo Bahamonde, and *The Impact of Short-Term Missions: A Case Study of House Construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch*, by Kurt Alan Ver Beek.

Most would agree that when STM personnel come from first-world countries (North American and Europe) and are exposed to different social and economic realities, they discover new perspectives for their own lives. The contact with poverty and health issues provides opportunity for growth and movement from prejudice to service.

The lack of access to health providers is something that shocks many first-time short-term missionaries. People die every day as victims of malaria (*paludism*). In Brazil this disease has already been largely controlled while in most African countries it is not. AIDS is another huge health problem. “The scale and trends of the epidemics in the region vary considerably, with southern Africa most affected. In 2007, this sub-region accounted for almost a third (32%) of all new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths globally, with national adult HIV prevalence exceeding 15% in eight countries in 2005 (Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). Nowhere else has national adult HIV prevalence reached such levels” (Sub-Sharan Africa AIDS 2008).

Low life expectancy in Africa results from inadequate health services (47 years is the average life expectancy), so one rarely sees large numbers of elderly persons (Africa: Life expectancy 2009). In Mozambique life expectancy is 41 years (Moçambique Expectativa de vida no nascimento 2009). “AIDS reduced life expectancy in the austral Africa from 62 to 49 years. ‘In these seven African countries where the infection rate with HIV is higher than 20%, the average life expectancy of a person born between 1995 and 2000 dropped to 49 years, 13 years less than before when AIDS still did not exist’, says the UN report” (AIDS reduces life expectancy in Austral Africa 2009).
This stark reality forces many first-world citizens involved in STM to wonder about the consumerism and wastefulness back in their home countries. Being brought face to face with such realities also encourages many to develop a broader “world citizenship” conscience (Linhart 2006:459). For instance, in Bissau, the capital of Guinea Bissau, water and electricity are only available for a short period of time, and at night no electrical power is available at all.

A Brazilian Experience in Short-Term Mission

Natanael B. P. Moraes and Berndt Wolter are professors at the Theological Seminary of the Brazilian Adventist University in São Paulo (UNASP). Natanael has been on five STM trips to Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. Berndt Wolter has served as a missionary in Germany for six years and as a short-term missionary in London in 2003, in Paris in 2004, among Portuguese-speaking people in the United States in 2006, and in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2008.

Since July 2004, the seminary has sent groups of theology students to participate in short-term mission evangelism in Africa. The first experience (2004) involved nine students and two professors who went to Beira, Mozambique. The following year two groups of twelve students went to Angola and Mozambique. In 2006 and 2007 two groups of students traveled to the archipelago of Cape Verde and to Guinea Bissau. Mozambique received a group of sixteen students and two teachers in 2008. A total of 73 students and four different professors have been involved in five short-term mission trips to Africa since 2004. These experiences have been supported financially by ShareHim, The Quiet Hour, and the local fields that host the short-term missionaries.

The idea of sending theology students on short-term mission trips resulted from the visit of Teodoro Elias, president of the Angolan Union, Victor Niconde, president of the Mozambican Union, and Gilberto Araújo, vice-president of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division to the campus of UNASP in March 2004. They explained the needs of their countries and the possibility, beginning in 2005, of working in partnership with ShareHim—an organization that promotes short evangelistic series. Then, unexpectedly, Gilberto Araújo wrote and invited the UNASP students to replace a team from Portugal that had been scheduled to visit Mozambique in 2004.

In the past five years UNASP students have been involved in intensive reaping campaigns of two or three weeks, they have preached in churches, rented facilities or spoken in the open at camp meetings, and have used the material provided by ShareHim (Bible study PowerPoint presentations) and The Quiet Hour (health lectures).
These evangelistic campaigns have resulted in 4,288 baptisms and have been a blessing for those baptized, for the local churches, and for those students who were involved in the meetings. The students especially have developed a new perspective on life.

The STM trips also pointed out some problems and limitations: (1) the impossibility to follow-up and disciple the new members, (2) the unfamiliarity with the local languages (there is no way students could learn Crioulo, the local language of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, or the dialect Papel of Guinea Bissau, or Ndao, Sena, or Changana, the native languages of Mozambique in such a short time), and (3) using an interpreter took half of the time allocated for the message.

On the other hand, contact with new and different cultures and congregations has provided many opportunities to see things done in innovative ways. For example, almost all Adventist churches in Mozambique invite newly baptized people to join a post-baptismal class to continue the learning process. These classes provide a sense of belonging to the new believers, deepen their understanding of Adventist doctrines, and give opportunity for discipleship.

In Bissau the churches provide a support person for each newly baptized member, which means that an experienced church member takes responsibility for the care of each new member to help him/her to grow strong in the faith and in relationship to the church.

AIDS is a reality in these countries, so the STM projects included health lectures including AIDS prevention and treatment. One evening a young lady, Cidália, came to the evangelistic meetings in Maputo because her father, who is a Seventh-day Adventist member of the church, invited her to the ShareHim meetings. She had visited a lot of churches searching for the truth, but most of all she was searching for love. Some time ago Cidália had gone to South Africa to marry a man who was working in the gold mines. He did not tell her that he had AIDS. After his death, Cidália discovered she had contracted AIDS from him. Since that time she had been very upset because she knew that some day...
she would die. In response to her father’s invitation, she attended the ShareHim program. Joel Cavalheiro, a seminary student, presented the health talks every night. After one of the presentations, Cidália talked with the pastor’s wife about the relevance of the program. She liked the spiritual messages, but there was something else that had touched her heart. It was the message about AIDS. She told Joel Cavalheiro that she had decided to be baptized because she had heard him speak so kindly about people with AIDS and about a God who forgives our sins and about a heaven that will be free from every infirmity and suffering. On Sabbath, July 12, Cidália was baptized by Pastor Berndt Wolter (Cavalheiro 2008).

Students from UNASP who go on a STM are required to attend training sessions beginning in March and lasting until the end of June. The training focuses on culture, customs, language, food, climate, local money, and special health care concerns. The goal is to encourage students to become flexible and adaptable in a different culture as well as to help them avoid any dangers they could face there. The guiding principles for the training of STM candidates are those suggested by Ulrike Sallandt (2007:196, 200). ShareHim also prepares the group for the specific tasks they will face in the field. And during the time the group is in Africa there are daily planning and evaluation meetings.

Since the students from UN-ASP could only stay for a short time, the follow-up of interests was conducted by the local administrators, pastors, and church leaders.

After the trip, when the team returns to the university, a thanksgiving meeting is organized, videos and pictures are presented, and many of the evangelistic experiences are shared with the students and teachers of UNASP. So far the partnerships between ShareHim, The Quiet Hour, the host fields, and UNASP have been positive for all the parties involved.

The STM report presented on campus helps keep participants accountable and encourages future involvement in the program. The videos and pictures help the next STM group understand the different and interesting aspects of African culture, such as the way they speak Portuguese, the custom of male friends expressing friendship by holding hands, the need to ask for permission to take pictures, respect for the privacy of Muslim people, and cultures that are not too worried about being on time for an event.

The video report of the 2005 meetings in Quelimane, the capital of Zambézia, Mozambique, included a short interview with a lady named Vanila Portugal. She had her baby tied on her back in a cloth called keka. In response to a question about her deepest needs and wishes, she answered that she...
wanted “Bibles and conflicts” (she meant Ellen White’s book, *The great controversy*). Only ten percent of the members in Mozambique have Bibles and Sabbath School lessons. When a member from a church in São Paulo saw the presentation, he decided to organize a campaign among the churches to gather “Bibles and Conflicts.” At the end he collected 12,000 Bibles and 12,000 copies of *The Great Controversy* which were shipped to Mozambique. During last year’s meetings each of the 230 people baptized in Maputo received a new Bible as a gift from the Riacho Grande Church in São Paulo.

The STM trips to Africa have been possible because of a united effort and the generosity of many people from the United States that support ShareHim and The Quiet Hour, as well as the Brazilian people who had the vision and energy to organize the yearly trips. It seems that “God may be using the economic power of rich churches to motivate believers to travel all over the world to bring assistance to those in need. After all, this was what the church in Antioch did for the church in Jerusalem” (Palomino 2007:213).

On the campus of UNASP, students and teachers have been enriched spiritually, culturally, socially, professionally, missiologically, and evangelistically. And as Wagner Kuhn suggests, “STM can help people understand the challenges of preaching the gospel in the context of the 10/40 window, provide opportunities for involvement in international evangelism, and can increase people’s commitment to preaching the gospel among the world’s unreached peoples. In this way STM trips provide insight into the real needs of the world church and is [sic] a seed sown that can produce future missionaries” (Kuhn 2007:65).

**Benefits**

Most of the 4,288 people baptized during the STM trips came from Christian backgrounds, others came from animistic religions, and a few came from a Muslim background. It seems that the approach employed through ShareHim is most effective when the audience is already Christian.

Another benefit of the STM trips was that a group of almost
80 students and professors had the opportunity to develop a sense of and be directly involved in world mission in parts of the world that still have large populations that have never had a chance to hear the gospel. Their experience impacted the whole university and encouraged a deeper commitment to mission.

The local conferences, unions, and divisions in Africa that hosted the STM groups were also benefited by the evangelistic work and also through the exchange of ideas. Many of the countries that hosted the STM groups face difficult situations, so to have a group come and assist in several projects was a real encouragement to them.

**Challenges**

The biggest challenge in Mozambique and Guinea Bissau is how to reach the Islamic population which is strongly opposed to the Christian faith. In 2004, a Mozambican pastor from Beira held evangelistic meetings in the neighboring country of Malawi where he baptized a young Muslim lady. On the day of her baptism she sang in the choir and was filled with the joy of salvation she had found in Jesus Christ. However, when she went home that night she was killed by her father and some of his friends because she had left Islam to become a Christian.

Another challenge is to find funding for STM trips, especially in view of the recent financial crisis. Perhaps if the church would view STM as an investment for the future of world mission, they would be willing to put more money into it in the hope that there would be an increasing number of young people willing to commit to full-time missionary service.

One of the biggest challenges is to figure out how to use the interest and enthusiasm for short-term mission service to reach people from different cultures and from the major world religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. How can STM groups impact the 10/40 window and help with the evangelization of the least evangelized countries of the world?

**Lessons Learned**

There are limits to what can be accomplished through STM. Evangelistic meetings are too short to nurture and disciple people into a lifestyle of evangelism and witness. People in the receiving countries are happy when Brazilians come, but more effort should be put into training the people in the local churches on how to do their own outreach and take care of the new Christians.

A possible solution would be for some of the missionaries to go to the field several weeks or months before the evangelistic meetings are to be held to work with the churches, train local leaders, and prepare people for baptism. The short two-week evangelistic series should only be used as a part of a larger evangelistic process. The local
Pastors in Africa are doing their best, but they face incredible challenges as many have fifteen to twenty churches and more than 1,500 members to care for. They work in areas of the world where many people are victims of poverty and where transportation and communication are often lacking. Sometimes they are so overwhelmed with the amount of work that they have to accomplish in their daily routine that asking them to prepare for an evangelistic event is too much for them.

New methods and approaches need to be developed that give support to the short-term evangelistic event. Small groups and a discipleship cycle to nurture people into mature faith and service is one thing that should accompany any series of meetings.

Most local churches in Africa would be richly blessed if the short-term missionaries would come with materials such as Bibles, hymnals, Sabbath School lessons, copyright-free electronic materials, and training materials for improving the lay leaders in the churches.

In the past five years we have learned that a country that sends people on STM trips increases its awareness of the need for greater involvement in world mission, and that there is much that the Brazilian church can do to impact unreached peoples in the 10/40 window. Therefore, as a result of STM over the last five years, a new sense of responsibility for world mission has developed among many of the members in Brazil.

It is also true that as the local churches, conferences, and unions in Brazil have sent their people to Africa, they have witnessed a growing commitment to mission efforts inside their own territory and have seen an increase in financial support for local outreach.

Suggestions and Conclusion

New methods and strategies need to be developed to effectively use STM groups in the 10/40 window. This is a very difficult area of the world for Christian mission, for most of the 2.68 billion people who live there have never had an opportunity to hear the good news about Jesus Christ (Burn 2007:47). The Joshua Project, a mission group that does research on the

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unreached peoples in the world, still lists 6,649 unreached people groups in 2009 (Joshua Project 2009).

Church and lay organizations could work in much closer cooperation, organizing successive STM projects and groups to impact the same communities over a longer time span. Too many STM projects are never part of a larger strategic plan to enhance the overall goals for an area or an unreached people group.

While it is true that STM trips have limitations and their effectiveness can be questioned, they are still important because of the general world mission awareness that is created and the responsibility that is raised among membership, pastors, and church leaders at different levels. The goal should be to plan and prepare so short-term results last for eternity.

The church must avoid complacency and inactivity because “when the church turns inward, it dies” (Allison and Anderson 2004:30-31). Therefore, better planning, better partnering with overseas fields, and longer on-going activities in the same location year after year will enable STM to have a more favorable impact on all parties concerned.

**Works Cited**


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**Forthcoming articles in the next issues of JAMS:**

- Oral Theologian: Paradigm Shift in Ministerial Training
- AIDS and Adventism in Africa
- Salvation without Scripture: Why Send Missionaries?
- Adventism among the World Religions
- Ethics in Short-Term Missions
- Adventism in South Africa
- The Gospel and Australian Culture
- The Seventh-day “Advenazi” Church
- Shaking Hands with the (D)evil: Adventism and Communism in Romania