

Adventist Perspectives on Short-Term Missions: Brief Survey and Evaluation

By Wagner Kuhn

The enormous phenomenon called Short-Term Mission (STM) has only recently caught the attention of some scholars who have started to study and reflect on this topic from a missiological perspective (Priest 2006:427). Previously, other Christian writers have written about this movement, but mostly they have described the benefits of those who participate in STM and have published manuals and books for orientation and training (see Livermore 2006; Fann and Taylor 2006; Dearborn 2003; Baumgartner 2002; and Van Cise 2004).

Other than brief news and reports that appear in church magazines and newspapers, little

has been written about STM within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Most news and information that is orally transmitted to family, friends, and church members or reported in church magazines and newspapers have presented the positive aspects and benefits of STM for those who participate. Committed and enthusiastic participants of STM usually provide positive reports of the benefits to both the individuals going and those receiving STM groups.

This article reports on a brief survey and evaluation of the STM phenomenon specifically within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This article does not survey the literature on this subject; rather it is based on observations drawn from the experiences of those involved in STM. I sent questionnaires to a selected group of people using a judgmental sample method. I chose twelve people who would receive the questionnaires and be interviewed. I sought answers to questions like: What are the benefits of STM for both the participants and the hosts? Are there challenges or disadvantages that should be discussed and studied? Is the STM phe-



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nomenon shaping the way the church engages and becomes involved in missions? Is training being provided for participants in STM?

I have organized the results of the questionnaires and interviews under six major categories: (1) limitations and context of this survey and evaluation, (2) importance of preparation and training for STM, (3) benefits and challenges for those who go as participants of a STM project, (4) positive and negative impact of STM upon the host mission field, (5) sponsors and promoters of STM: taking the responsibility seriously, and (6) STM: where to from here?

lived and worked in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Euro-Asia. Together they speak and understand at least a dozen languages and are able to explain or understand some of the major contours of their own culture (nationals) or the culture where they live and work (expatriate and/or IDE missionaries).

Their experiences vary from being personally involved with from one or two to thirty-two STM trips. They have also hosted individuals or groups and as a group have coordinated forty different STM projects. Years and years of planning, hard work, commitment, and efforts have been dedicated to these STM

Little has been written about short-term mission within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Limitations and Context of this Brief Survey and Evaluation

The survey was limited to the experiences of only twelve participants. The participants had a variety of ethnic backgrounds coming from the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia and included local lay members, national church workers, as well as expatriates (IDE). Their professional backgrounds included health/medical field, education/development work, administration, pastoral/ministerial, and missionary and they had

projects. Why? Because most STM participants passionately believe in God's mission so are encouraged to continue being involved in the Adventist Church's short-term mission projects.

It is also important to note that although I have authored this article, the ideas and comments expressed are those of the respondents. I have tried to express their opinions and comments, their statements and ideas, as they expressed them. As you read this article, bear in mind that each paragraph expresses the comments

and suggestions of the surveyed participants.

Importance of Preparation and Training for STM

One of the first benefits of training is that it helps the participants avoid major problems or cultural blunders. Training functions as an eye-opener and helps give insights into the new reality short-term missionaries will have to deal with and relate to. Nationals and expatriate workers who have lived in the communities are some of the best teachers for those participating

each participant, and leads to better and quantifiable results. It is also important that training be in-depth and specific to the region where the participants will be working. Specific training should share which strategies work better, which ones do not work so should be avoided, what needs to be done, what kind of resources can be used, and what approaches and methods work best in a specific cultural setting.

Appropriate preparation and training help participants avoid friction with the administrators

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in STM trips for they can point out the cultural baggage people bring and help the participants be more sensitive to the people and to the community they will be working with. Those surveyed suggested that when the first days of the mission trip are planned so the participants mingle with the people and engage in some social activity to help them get used to the people and the new environment, the work done in the following weeks is done in a more effective way.

Preparation helps standardize programs, takes into account the individual contribution of

of the host mission fields for it is the responsibility of the trainer to screen candidates for possible misfits. It is also important that dialogue and communication commence long before a group arrives at their specific mission field so participants know what to expect and what is expected of them.

Moreover, it is preferable that the training be administered by someone with previous missionary experience, someone who knows the benefits and challenges of the STM program, but who will also provide appropriate information that will

help prevent problems for both those who participate and those that receive the STM groups. The following list is a sample of the types of training needed by STM participants.

1. Two types of training are needed: training prior to the STM trip and on-site training.

2. Some colleges and universities provide training that is more related to understanding the peculiar aspects of the host culture, and what must be done or avoided. Survey participants felt that cross-cultural training is usually limited and needs to be expanded, needs to be more relevant to the specific host culture, and is more relevant if done once the short-term volunteers arrive in the host country.

3. Many of those surveyed emphasized the evangelistic methods of Jesus, which some suggest work in each and every culture. Jesus preached the gospel of friendship and love. He was an expert in human relations. Jesus' model is always effective as people are in need of love, care, support, respect, and fair treatment.

4. Most mentioned that the current STM orientation or training is too short. They questioned if only a half day or one day orientation was adequate. It is impossible to learn about a culture even in a week of training. Generally the feeling was that most training is very superficial; nevertheless, it does provide students and participants of STM a basic understanding of the coun-

try and its cultural aspects.

5. Sometimes the STM training covers a few of the challenges the participants will face. In many cases training for programs like "ShareHim" just focuses on the evangelistic resources that will be utilized in the field, such as sermons, media, and power point presentations.

6. In some places a short indoctrination on the dos and don'ts of mission service is provided, but much of the training occurs on site by osmosis, observation, and open discussions. Too much is left to on-the-job learning.

7. If appropriate training is provided the possibility of culture shock is minimized. Training also helps in the prevention of disease. Those who follow instructions usually are those who do not get malaria, typhoid fever, etc.

8. The advantages to those who receive training are that they can better avoid relationship problems with national church workers, pastors, and church members, and that they also know how to better relate to persons of the opposite sex. Leaders and trainers of STM groups must themselves be well prepared and experienced so that the time and effort of the STM participants will be maximized. Many short-termers mentioned that they were getting up to speed only when the STM trip was ending.

9. There was the belief that all are trained in one way or another. As people participate

they are changed; those who are more observant are more effective, and for them, the benefits are greater. It is also important for participants to learn basic mission principles that they can apply during their STM trip, but unfortunately most training does not focus on those principles.

10. Because training is so important for those who participate in STM trips, each host mission field should prepare a simple manual with important aspects of culture, needs, mindset of the people, different religious beliefs and practices, and environment. Such information would be important and relevant for every short-term missionary to know as they work in the community.

Benefits and Disadvantages for Participants of STM Projects

I have divided this section into two parts: benefits or advantages, and challenges or disadvantages of STM. According to the survey respondents, the various benefits of STM mainly impact those who participate in such missions. These benefits are further divided into four areas of benefit: spiritual, cultural/social, professional/practical, and missiological/evangelistic.

Spiritual Benefits

The spiritual benefits of STM include contributing to the fulfillment of the Great Commission, helping participants experience God's power and grace as they

engage in evangelism and as they spend hours preparing and praying for the project, and staying in contact with the mission field as they continue to financially support mission projects. Student missionaries are never the same after taking part in a STM. Their vision and values change. Their lives are forever changed. When the experience is positive, most short-termers continue to support the mission of the church. Many STM participants experience improvement in their spirituality and prayer life.

Cultural and Social Benefits

STM participants are blessed as they experience a new culture, new people, and new challenges. The cultural insights gained in STM trips are of benefit because even in a short period the missionaries begin to reflect and reevaluate their worldviews and value systems. Being in a new culture allows STM participants an opportunity to see problems solved in new ways. This benefit often results in people encouraging others to go on future STM trips with the result that others also grow in their cultural understanding.

Short-term missions can be viewed as a vacation or mission tourism, but many gain a deep sense of community and fellowship. Most projects promote unity and *koinonia* among group members which encourage a new communal dimension in the individualistic lifestyles of the West.

*Professional and
Practical Benefits*

STM requires less preparation and disruption than full-time mission service since there is no need to sell one's house, furniture, or car.

When groups go on STM they are able to take necessary goods and supplies and share them with those in need so STM trips provide opportunities to serve and help in a way that allows people to feel good about their accomplishments.

The "ShareHim" evangelism program allows many students who could not afford to go on a STM project to participate

in the problems of the mission or local church, so no instability is created.

*Missiological and
Evangelistic Benefits*

STM projects establish connections with long-term missionaries, and if short-termers have a positive experience they often remain open to missions the rest of their lifetime. Another benefit is that STM projects connect regular (lay) people with what God is doing in overseas mission fields and bring church members into contact with those who have a passion and calling for mission work.

Being in a new culture allows STM participants an opportunity to see problems solved in new ways.

because of the financial help provided by that organization. The program also provides discipline for STM participants by scheduling home visits from 9 to 12 a.m., study and sermon preparations from 2 to 5 p.m., and public evangelistic meetings from 7:30 to 9 p.m.

Most STM projects are for a short period, so there is a focus on work and completing the task. The short duration does not permit the local church to become dependent on the outside evangelist or work crew, and neither is there enough time for the participants to get involved

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 peoples' 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 a seed sown that can produce future missionaries. Many return from STM trips with realigned priorities and eyes opened to the needs of the less fortunate so STM creates a larger and more global vision of

the mission of the church.

There are also disadvantages and challenges faced by those involved in STM that impact participants in the same four areas: spiritual, cultural/social, professional/practical, and mis-siological/evangelistic.

Spiritual Disadvantages

The spiritual challenges are only indirectly related to the many disadvantages of STM trips. One problem is that the spiritual high experienced by the participants tends to be short-lived. They make many promises, engage in a lot of prayer and Bible reading, commit themselves to a more spiritual and missionary lifestyle, and then, just a couple of weeks or months later the spiritual zeal and fervor fades away.

Cultural and Social Disadvantages

Pre-trip training about culture can prove to be an advantage, but the lack of such training has resulted in major problems for those who take part in STM. Below are listed several common problems the survey participants listed.

1. Some of the attitudes, behaviors, and even body language of short-termers can have a very negative connotation in some cultures.

2. The preaching approach is usually done in a Western style and often neglects the social and religious aspects that make sense to those in the local culture.

3. Interaction with people in a different cultural setting and language must be done with sensitivity and respect. However, STM participants are sometimes lacking in this area.

4. The gospel needs to be communicated in a way that its content and implications are relevant and clear to the local community. Generally, short-termers do not have this ability.

5. It is impossible for short-termers to learn the culture during a STM trip, so many blunders result.

6. The use of translation is often a barrier to a meaningful and complete cultural and personal connection between the missionary and the local community.

Professional and Practical Disadvantages

The survey participants indicated the following professional and practical disadvantages for those going on STM.

1. STM does not easily allow participants to return to the same place to help disciple and nurture the new believers. Most STM trips are very short with little time provided to implement a mission that can produce lasting results.

2. There is a very real risk of getting sick.

3. Many well intentioned but often ethnocentric expatriates, after arriving in the mission field, start to point out to the local workers that the methods they are using are not appropriate or correct. This creates confusion and discord.

4. The cost of most STM trips is so high that many cannot afford to participate.

Missiological and Evangelistic Disadvantages

Survey participants also listed several missiological and evangelistic problems

1. STM does not allow for personal involvement in the evangelistic experience through discipleship and nurture. New members do not receive appropriate training and often are not involved in the activities of the church.

2. Many STM groups insist on doing things their way without considering the needs of the mission field and customs and

the needed time to do a solid work and if nationals are not connected and involved in the work, the results will be small and disappointing. Many new believers become attached to the foreigner so when they leave, the new believers lose their desire to attend church. When the dynamic program with power point and special affects has ended and the missionary has returned home, many newly baptized people leave the church.

5. STM trips do not provide sufficient time to implement long-term goals or enough time to ground the new converts.

6. Some new members have reported that after the evange-

Often when the short-termers leave, the local people are left with the problems produced by the visitors.

culture of the local people. Even when participants are informed about the most effective and appropriate methods, they continue to insist that their methods are the best and that they must be followed. Often when the short-termers leave, the local people are left with the problems produced by the visitors.

3. STM programs lack a holistic approach. Usually only preaching or evangelism is emphasized without any attention given to social activities.

4. STM trips do not allow

istic program ends and the missionaries leave there is a vacuum. No follow-up takes place, no nurturing or discipling is done, so many newly baptized believers just drop out and go back to their old day-to-day reality.

Impact of STM Upon the Host Mission Field

There are many positive aspects of STM on the host field that seem to provide good justification for STM when done appropriately. But, there are several negative aspects as well.

One of the most important aspects mentioned by several participants in this brief survey is that STM projects help to create a spiritual revival in the local churches where an evangelistic program is conducted.

Positive Spiritual Impact

STM trips often awaken an evangelistic and missionary spirit among participants and can increase their involvement in missionary activities. Participants get involved in inviting visitors to the meetings, take an active part in small groups, help with reception work, children stories, special music, and visit interests.

STM groups often demonstrate to the local community that the church is interested in the spiritual, social, and personal well being of believers and non-believers alike so STM groups can boost the spiritual life of the local church and improve its social awareness.

Positive Cultural and Social Impact

Those surveyed listed the following positive cultural and social areas where STM impacted the host communities: the host church had contact with another culture, the host community benefits by having people from another culture or country visit, projects often boost the morale of the local community, the local community is also blessed by the fact that many local people become involved in the program,

and the local community gains status and reaffirmation and a sense of importance by having people travel a long distance to visit and work with them.

Positive Professional and Practical Impact

Survey respondents also suggested that positive benefits resulted in many professional and practical areas:

1. STM trips use the human resources that the church has trained and invested in to impact the host community.

2. STM projects provide opportunities for the implementation of new strategies. Volunteer evangelists often motivate national workers and local church members to use the same model used in the STM programs for their own evangelistic strategies.

3. Host churches receive a break from coming up with new worship ideas and sermons.

4. Project recipients receive various resources, medical supplies, and financial help, and often partnerships are formed that provide additional human and capital assistance. Investment is made in equipment which otherwise would not be available for many local churches.

5. Volunteers often bring other material resources with them to help the local church and mission. Moreover, the building of churches is a blessing to the local mission.

6. Since the local mission and church do not have to spend much of their own funds for STM

projects, there is a financial advantage. However, local churches and missions often provide food and board for those who participate in the projects.

7. The STM participants are generally young people between 20 to 30 years of age who are highly motivated. The local church can be motivated for mission and evangelism because of the inspiration of the young people who came from distant places to help.

8. There is increased mission involvement in the local mission by pastors and church members

for local leaders and pastors.

The results achieved by STM projects also give the local believers new motivation and a solid practical base for maintaining and implementing similar projects locally. STM projects that expand the number of Seventh-day Adventist churches in a city provide new opportunities for the growth of the church and the services the Church can offer the community. In addition, the interaction between Adventist Christians provides insights into different ways people practice their be-

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as they contribute and support future projects.

Positive Missiological and Evangelistic Impact

Those surveyed saw positive benefits in the missiological and evangelistic areas such as host churches learning about new evangelistic and preaching styles, having Adventist doctrines and theology confirmed and unity strengthened, church growth taking place as new members join bringing new life and energy to local Adventist churches, and by having STM suggest new models of outreach

and help people understand what it means to belong to an international fellowship.

Negative Aspects

Although there are not a lot of problems or negative aspects of STM trips, there are some that create major challenges, especially when some of the programs from the West aim for large numbers of baptisms. Some of these challenges are listed below:

1. Due to the short duration of many evangelistic meetings, there is not adequate preparation for those who attend the series so people are rushed into baptism

in a way that weakens spiritual growth. It is almost impossible to guide the many new converts into a firm and lasting relationship with Christ and help them avoid the evil spiritual tendencies in their culture when the series is so short (the surveyed participants mentioned specifically the *ShareHim* program in this regard).

2. Because evangelistic series are so short, the final baptismal ceremony is an event which generates a lot of pressure for quick results. Some evangelism coordinators push the local church elders, pastors, and mission ad-

ministrators to ease up on their policies in regards to approving baptismal candidates. tribution remains, no churches have been built, the community did not benefit from any medical or health program, and no long-term partnerships were established.

Sponsors and Promoters of STM: Taking the Responsibility Seriously

Many of the survey respondents indicated that there is no advantage of STM over regular long-term mission. Many participants of STM only come for a couple of weeks or less, and due to this fact there is no long-term commitment to the host mission

Survey respondents indicated that there is no advantage of short-term mission over regular long-term mission.

ministrators to ease up on their policies in regards to approving baptismal candidates.

3. Some coordinators from the West have even been quoted as saying that because the STM project is sponsored by wealthy people, there needs to be results; donors want to see mass baptisms if they are to continue funding STM evangelism.

4. Too often the local church and mission are not involved in the planning and strategies used in the STM project resulting in problems for the local church.

5. Many times after the participants of STM evangelism leave no visible or physical con-

tribution remains, no churches have been built, the community did not benefit from any medical or health program, and no long-term partnerships were established. Therefore the sponsors and promoters of STM must make a concerted effort to engage in dialogue with the host mission field before any STM takes place.

It has been noted that in many places in Africa, Asia, and Central and South America, the projects that yield the best and lasting results are not the onetime STM project, but are those where groups commit themselves to go again and again to help over at least a three-year period. These long-term partnerships formed with a host church or mission bring far reaching and positive results and indicate a deeper level of commitment and responsibly.

Long-term partnerships help local churches maintain positive engagement in local community projects and enable local churches to gain more visibility in the local community. Just a few STM groups are able to effectively contribute to the local church and the social needs of the community. This again shows the advantages of long-term partnerships.

It has been noted that prior to sending STM groups, it is advisable for sponsors to involve group members in community and social work in their local communities as a training exercise. This type of pre-trip training raises social awareness and is important for the success of STM.

For many participants, the difference between STM and Long-Term Mission (LTM) is that the STM is like playing at being a missionary. STM is a "spiritual vacation," but a little different due to the fact that one preaches, feels good, but in just a couple of weeks returns home. Real sacrifice is not needed. The participants do not lose anything, they only gain: a ticket, food, lodging, and many other benefits as mentioned earlier. LTM involves bigger and more complex types of sacrifice for the whole missionary family such as changes in lifestyles, difficult transitions, long-term absence from family and friends, and so on.

Survey respondents indicated that the purpose of STM is not only the implementation of the mission of the church as a whole,

but the training and discipleship of both short-termers who in turn become committed church members and hopefully could become full-time missionaries, and also of host church members and leaders who employ their energies and acquired skills for the kingdom of God. STM, when properly implemented, is a good strategy to encourage people to make a life commitment to LTM.

When STM becomes an end in itself, it can result in few positive long-term results. Therefore, for every individual participating in a STM, there should be a local person in the host community who receives discipleship and training. This kind of partnership will enhance the whole project and produce long-term benefits for both visitors and the host community. When sponsors decide to invest in the human resources of the host mission field, and allow the STM project to be lead by local leaders, the results are more satisfying for all concerned.

Survey participants noted that LTM can exhaust the energies of both missionaries and local church members and their leaders. LTM often accounts for fewer baptisms, but the positive side is that there are also fewer backsliders. In some places the baptismal results from a STM trip is more than the entire goal of the whole mission field for a whole year. Because the cost of LTM for the local field is often unaffordable, STM appeals to some national leaders as they

benefit from the resources channeled through STM initiatives. STM projects also engage a lot of people and focus a lot of energy to accomplish a task in a short period of time.

Many things cannot be accomplished by new church members due to their limited Bible knowledge and lack of understanding about church structure and policies. STM can make a positive contribution to the local mission fields when participants intentionally work to understand and partner with local teams helping them come up with solutions and strategies that are most beneficial

pastors and leaders can usually do local mission outreach better than STM visitors, it is imperative that STM groups never discourage the participation of local church members in evangelistic efforts. Some have suggested that as “dorcas” and “community services” have been given to an “institutionalized ADRA,” the same thing is now happening with local mission outreach projects that in many parts of the world are being transferred to programs like “ShareHim” and other STM initiatives.

2. STM groups must realize that some people believe that

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locally. In order for this to happen, short-termers need to demonstrate that they are interested in the projects and needs of the local mission field. Again, partnerships that provide human resource development, training, evangelistic equipment, educational materials, and medical supplies are appreciated and helpful.

Below are listed additional suggestions mentioned by the survey respondents that need to be taken seriously by sponsors and coordinators of STM as they promote and partner with local mission fields:

1. Because national church

anyone coming from North American represents “true Adventism” and the General Conference. Therefore, anything the group does must legitimize the efforts of the world church in the eyes of the local church. STM groups must also be seen as supporting the mission and evangelistic efforts that are already taking place in the local field. STM groups come to legitimize what local church members and pastors are already doing.

3. STM projects bring resources to local communities that they otherwise cannot afford. This is considered by most

as an advantage, a benefit. But many are concerned that this practice fosters dependency on outside resources and limits creativity and resourcefulness by the local people.

4. It is important to distinguish between STM and LTM. Both are unique and different. There is a priority for the church to emphasize LTM, but it is better to be involved in STM than not to be involved in missions at all.

5. Survey respondents have indicated that because the church has done very little in terms of promoting overseas missionary outreach, and has managed mission resources poorly, hundreds of independent or supporting ministries have emerged that are engaged in STM initiatives.

6. When STMs are conducted and sponsored by educational institutions or local churches, the survey participants noted the following:

a. STM trips should continue because large numbers of people are being baptized. For example, during the last four years (2004-2007), an Adventist college has sent several dozen of its students as short-term missionaries to a least four countries in Africa and as a result there have been 4,071 baptisms. If it were not for these STM groups, few of these people would have known the gospel of salvation or ever been baptized. The four years of STM involvement in Africa has resulted in an awakening of the missionary spirit among these college students.

b. Survey respondents also indicated that after participants of STM return, sponsoring churches expect reports on what took place. The reports are looked forward to with so much expectation that the churches are often packed with visitors who come to participate in the program (in one particular college, both the president of the local Union and Division were present, supporting the college's STM initiatives).

c. STM engages youth from all walks of life and from all backgrounds and fields of interest. This not only motivates some to follow a career as long-term missionaries, but some have also become tentmakers, i.e. self-supporting missionaries.

d. The work of organizing and leading STM in a university setting helps many to acquire a concern for the salvation of the lost and imprints a sense of mission on the hearts and minds of young students. Accordingly, STM helps students set priorities for their lives, creates in them a sense of responsibility for the evangelization of the world, both locally and globally.

e. Survey participants also noted that those who hear about STM in the context of what college or university students are doing decide to enroll in that particular college because of their STM program.

f. Many students (mostly theology majors) who have participated in the ShareHim program reported the advantages they

have had because of the type of partnerships the ShareHim program created with the theology department: curriculum is enriched, students mature, and the program graduates feel they are part of a world church.

g. If it were not for STM, some colleges and churches would have no other mission involvement. STM initiatives help students be part of an outreach program and in the process learn to depend on God and prepare for future mission service.

h. STM trips help keep local church members connected to overseas mission activities and help lift the spirituality of the whole congregation.

i. STM also strengthens the mission of the local church. Many who participate in STM become faithful supporters of both local and international missions. Offerings and giving increase as the result of a wider involvement of local church members in STM.

Short-Term Mission: Where to From Here?

STM holds great potential for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As the world becomes smaller and more globalized, it seems that churches and institutions in the more affluent countries are sending an ever increasing number of people on STM trips. Local pastors often spend a portion of their vacation on STM trips in order to contribute to the overall mission of the world church.

Several survey respondents noted that the types of STM projects that will help the church in the long run are those that make partnerships a priority. Mission partnerships usually result in projects that produce concrete and lasting benefits such as church and school buildings, clinics, orphanages, etc. When the STM team leaves, the whole community, not just the church, has benefited.

Although the church has not researched the STM movement, and there has not been a coordinated approach to prioritize projects, some respondents observed that projects aimed at reaching out to the local community physically, socially, and spiritually do bring long-lasting benefits. Local community leaders always welcome and show receptivity to those partnering teams who get involved in helping provide the basic needs of the larger community.

Communities have become more aware of how the world operates and are less sympathetic with STM groups whose only priority is to convert and baptize people. Most communities want to see practical results from those who profess to be Christians before they are interested in spiritual topics. Therefore, it is imperative for STM teams to develop a strategy that is holistic in its approach to cross-cultural mission and take into consideration the different needs of each local community to which they go to serve.

It was noted that STM will not contribute or add any value to the mission of God if most of the efforts are spent making sure that those who go are the ones rewarded for their contribution. Mission must be a two-way street. The focus and vision of those who take part in STM must be to serve and honor God as they care and provide for the needs of their neighbors, even if it is only for a couple of weeks.

Conclusion

Interestingly, survey respondents pointed out that the church as a whole must rethink and re-

As clearly pointed out, there are many advantages for the church and its members in being involved in STM. It seems, however, that several major concerns expressed by those who responded to this survey need to be dealt with seriously by participants and sponsors of STM trips if this mission enterprise should continue. As most short-termers come from more affluent Western countries, they carry along the values of their culture. It was noted that one of the values associated with STM is instant gratification, a value closely related to many Western affluent

Projects aimed at reaching out to the local community physically, socially, and spiritually bring long-lasting benefits.

structure its mission enterprise. A question was asked: How can STM initiatives accomplish the mission of the church—God’s mission—when in many cases short-term mission trips last no more than five days, including travel time? Modern missionaries save a lot of travel time, but are spending less and less time ministering in the field. One participant pointed out that Jonah preached his message of judgment for 40 days, while Noah spent 120 years in his mission, and Jesus spent nearly 30 years preparing for a mission that lasted only three and half years.

cultures where the consumer needs to feel rewarded instantly or in a very short period of time.

Why are STM trips becoming shorter and shorter? Is it because short-termers unconsciously behave as consumers who need to be instantly rewarded by their involvement in STM? It has been noted that lack of time for training of participants, lack of long-term commitment, and lack of personal relationships and involvement with host communities resembles this consumer oriented value of instant gratification. Are short-termers also modeling such values and

philosophy of life where not only things but also relationships and people can be used for their own instant gratification and then discarded? Are the values of a consumer oriented culture that uses something or someone for a brief period of time and then disposes of them being unconsciously carried and promoted by those involved in STM?

It is imperative then that the phenomenon of STM be further studied in light of these preliminary observations and that more investigation, analyses, and evaluation be done based on a solid biblical as well as missiological understanding of the practice of mission.

This article has just begun to explore this subject in view of this growing missionary enterprise within the church. As seen, there are serious questions that still need to be studied and evaluated in the context of Adventist involvement and support of STM projects. Some of the questions that will have to be addressed in further studies include: What is the possible impact of STM in regards to long-term career missionaries? Does support for STM decrease the support for LTM and for the global mission of the church? How should STM be coordinated and prioritized? How long should STM trips last? Is there a need for STM to be scaled down? To what extent could agencies and institutions like ADRA, Loma Linda, or programs like ShareHim, partner with those who go and those who host

STM initiatives? How can STM be an intentional vehicle for LTM? Could there be a mechanism whereby STM participants would have priority in being selected to go as career missionaries? Are STM programs giving birth to new long-term career missionaries? What are the criteria to select and send STM participants? Does the Holy Spirit have any role?

The task is huge! And the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few (Matt 9:37). Since the church is not able to send thousands and thousands of career missionaries to the field, should it ask the Lord of the harvest to send short-termers?

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