

2014 Brazil STM Reflections -- Elder Johnson Lee

This short-term mission trip to Brazil has expanded my understanding of short-term missions. Even though the trip covered a small area and in a short time, nevertheless it was still a response to the Great Commission. Mission trips are not only meant to share the Gospel but is in fact the first step to carrying out the Great Commission. The Bible tells us, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...”—Matt 28:19-20. Therefore, making disciples, baptizing, teaching, even encouraging coworkers and strengthening the church are all ministries done on mission trips.

I. Go

As with any typical STM trip, we stepped out of our comfort zone and came in contact with people and things that were not common to us on a daily basis. For many team members, this was their first time to the southern hemisphere. In addition, this was the first time we went to a country whose language is totally foreign to us (Portuguese). One time I was waiting with brother Chang for someone on the street. No matter how much we tried to use our body language, it was impossible to get our point across. That certainly allowed us to understand what it feels like when we cannot communicate with others. This was also our first time to work alongside the medical STM team with Rev. Jorge Loo. The devotion passage in Acts 3:6 said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” This inevitably made me to think. “Isn’t this what we’re about to do?” In sharing the Gospel, when have we had the opportunity to heal someone physically as well as spiritually?

II. Lead People to Christ

No matter if it was during evangelistic meetings or when we were seeking shelter from the rain or during the graduation ceremony of an after-school counseling class; whether our target was a businessman, a patient waiting to be seen, or someone who came to learn the language, we did not miss any opportunity to share the Gospel. God was very merciful. Not only did He allow us to have a loving heart, He also enabled our subject of conversation to feel our love as well. This has allowed the Gospel to enter their hearts with ease, paving the way for the local coworkers to also experience the joy of harvest with our team.

III. Make Disciples

At Belo Horizonte, we had disciple-making gatherings almost every night. The topics included: “How to do devotion?”, “Pray”, “Read the Bible”, “What kind of God is our God.” At the same time there was another group focusing on Christian topics for the young people, including: “Establishing your value system”, “Planning your job future”, “Dating and marriage”, and “Controlling your emotions” etc. For everyone on STM team preparing for these topics was a big challenge. Each of us spent a lot of time praying and preparing. When we actually began serving and seeing local coworkers who not only went to work during the day but whole-heartedly joining in every night’s gathering, this was indeed a huge encouragement in our serving. This was also God’s grace, allowing us to experience first-hand that even though we were inadequate, when we relied on the confidence in Him and offered up ourselves, we could become His vessels in many ways and be a blessing to others.

IV. Baptize

Our team was indeed blessed: we witnessed the establishment of a new church in Salvador and participated in their first breaking of bread and baptism ceremonies. Even though the number in this

church was not many, we were blessed with being able to join in their first worship service. We were able to experience a little of the joy the apostle Paul had in establishing churches in various places. I believe the next time when I read the book of Acts, I will surely have a deeper level of sentiment. We witnessed the baptism of the three brothers and sisters on the sea shore of El Salvador; with the sunshine, the Pacific Ocean, seagulls, and the people walking by to stop and witness God's saving mercy and power. This was certainly an unforgettable experience!

V. Teaching Them to Obey

Most of the previous STM trips I have participated in were focused on sharing the Gospel. Rarely did I have the opportunity to explain in detail the content of salvation and how to systematically apply it to our everyday lives. Thanks to God that as a response to the request of local coworkers, we prepared a lot of practical and advanced disciple-training materials before we left. We also prepared practical subject matters to be applied in their daily living, their work, and their interpersonal relationship. Regardless of the type of training, we based our foundation on the Bible, taking what we received from the Lord to teach them to obey. We also took this opportunity to better organize our own faith, lives, and testimonies. We used the gifts that God gave us to be manifested in the materials we prepared. As noted in Colossians 1:28, we were able to experience the truth in God's word.

VI. Encourage Coworkers

An unusual experience on this trip: not having to go around to different destinations but settling down in one city once we arrived and working alongside a group of local coworkers, day and night for almost a week's time. Not only did we build up a working relationship with them, we had many opportunities to share our life challenges as well. We discovered that not only can the testimonies we planned benefit others, but when we have the opportunity we were able to share our own challenges and encourage the local coworkers. This type of serving was over and above what's required in our ministry and yet offered our fellow members of the body in Christ the kind of love and caring that is genuine, profound, and personal.

VII. Build up the Church

Our team worked with two churches in Salvador and Belo Horizonte. They differed in the number of members, background, and the inter-working among the coworkers. But like all churches, they had challenges they needed to overcome in the areas of church growth. Even though our team came from a church with relatively few difficulties, we were able to still offer complementary advice from our experiences in other settings. We found that besides caring for the local coworker, we were able to help in many other aspects of the church such as the organization of coworkers, the match-up of ministries, the partnership in serving, etc. During the entire process, we learned to treasure what we already have, that as churches in North America, we are immensely blessed resources! Even though we face few of the same difficulties that they experience, we can still share with them what we've learned.

I have the same kind of thoughts after each STM trip, that what we learn from others can equal what are able to offer. At the same time, God used them to motivate our members' hearts to love God, love others, and be thankful always. I think using "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" to describe our journey this time is appropriate!