

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Youth Mission Trip Policies and Procedures

The traditional understanding of mission is of professional persons, generally clerics and religious, who have dedicated their lives to the work of evangelization, spreading the Gospel of Jesus, at home or abroad, either to those who have not heard it or whose faith is weak for lack of ministers.

Since Vatican Council II (1963-1965) and the pronouncements of Pope Paul VI and John Paul II, mission is understood in a much broader sense. As the People of God, we are all called to be missionaries, but not limited exclusively to the traditional form of mission.

The idea of mission today encompasses various activities, which fall into different categories, namely: the traditional, Corporal Works of Mercy, and immersion.

The traditional view is of missionaries, Clerics, Religious and sometimes even lay persons who are dedicated to spreading the Gospel by word and deed, either for life or for a fixed period of time, at home. Missionary endeavors are their sole purpose in life during this period and their home communities generally support them.

Another view of mission is The People of God bringing material aid such as food or medicine to those in dire need, offering their time and resources in the Corporal Works of Mercy.

A new vision of mission, growing out of Vatican Council II, is of the People of God who go primarily to the poor ,at home or abroad , to accompany them and learn to understand and appreciate other cultures and values. Such activities called Mission Immersion Experience, allow people to reach out to others as equals.... Parishes and dioceses that go into an immersion experience do so to strengthen their own faith as they try to understand the nuances of how the faith is lived in other cultures.

This is also a preparation for what often becomes a more formal mission relationship called Parish Twinning or Diocesan Twinning. Twinning means that the parishes or the diocese on each side of the border share their faith and their gifts through a process of ongoing mutual exchange and celebration.

It is in this light that we can consider mission trips. Our work of youth ministry is broad based, involving forming of the faith community, appropriating the faith, forming Christian conscience, educating for justice, facilitating personal development, and developing leaders for the future. Short term mission trips are an important tool that can assist in accomplishing each of these tasks.

Through mission trips, youth, Parish Catechetical Leaders of Youth, campus ministry leaders, and key volunteers participate in the mission of the entire Church to proclaim the Gospel to all people.

....missions instill in youth a spirit of service to the poor and are opportunities to connect the Church's social teachings with practical experience. Additionally they provide an opportunity for leadership development by involving youth in increasing levels of responsibility through planning and organization.

Most importantly, mission trips require careful planning and forethought so they can be safe and rewarding experiences.

This document, taken from a section of the Catholic Youth Ministry Handbook 4th Edition, is intended as a resource to ensure both.

**(This section is adapted from World Mission Sunday, A booklet with suggestions and ideas for Mission-minded parishes, Education Committee Mission Council of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.)*

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Youth Mission Trip Policies and Procedures (Cont).

- All mission trips must be planned carefully according to the policies of this document.
- No mission trips should be done outside of the United States. Mission trips to U.S. territories are not allowed.
- A proposal must be submitted in writing to the Pastor/High School Principal with copies sent to the Archdiocesan Director of Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization and to the Director of Risk Management. The proposal must include:
 - Completed proposal form (page 87 of CYM Handbook)
 - Checklists for staff and participants
 - Maps of the location
 - Contact information of Site Host
 - Plan for preparation (education about missions, information on the site, the purpose of the trip, what will happen on the trip, emergency information, etc.)
 - Plan for follow-up (theological reflection on the experience is an essential component of the trip and is not to be omitted).
 - Parent/Youth Orientation Meeting Outline
- Prepare and implement a Parent/Youth Orientation Meeting. This gathering will include much of what was placed in the proposal (education about missions, information on the site, the purpose of the trip, what will happen on the trip, emergency information, safety issues, etc.)
- Mission trips are to be done in cooperation and collaboration with the local diocese or recognized mission agencies. In the very early stages of planning, the local Office of Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization must be contacted and informed of your presence. In making this contact, groups will be apprised of the safe environment policies that exist for that local Church. In places where no Diocesan Office of Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization exists, contact the Chancellor's Office.
- Travel must follow archdiocesan procedures with full insurance coverage.
- Parish/School Leaders participating in missions must have multiple experiences in assisting in local service projects (day or weekend).
- No alcohol or illicit drugs is to be consumed during the trip by any personnel, whether staff or youth (refer to drug and alcohol policies, page 37 of CYM Handbook).
- All groups must adhere to the policies which refer to working with youth (Liability, Permission and Medical Release Forms, VIRTUS training, Criminal Background checks for all adults, etc.).
- For religious pilgrimages, please contact the OACE for consultation.

Procedures

- Basic Spanish language familiarity might be included as part of the preparation, including workshops on language basics and cultural norms. Ensure that some of the participants are fluent.

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Youth Mission Trip Policies and Procedures (Cont).

What steps do I need to take prepare a Mission Immersion or Mission Trip?

- Adult leaders are to participate in a “staff” mission trip prior to involving youth
 - The Office of Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston highly suggests before a youth/campus ministry Mission Trip should occur, that an adult from the parish, and possibly a team of adults would visit the sites prior to taking youth.
 - This experience offers the coordinator (s) the opportunity:
 - To see firsthand what a mission experience is, to reflect on what mission truly is and calls us to.
 - To make contacts with those in the various areas you will visit and serve.
 - To spend time to reflect on the experience.
 - To develop a well thought out, prepared, and safe experience for your youth.
- Develop a Mission Team. The parish mission team should be made up of the Pastor, Adult Volunteers, and other parish ministries.
 - Planning should begin well in advance of the desired trip.
 - Mission trips should be developed and well thought out. These experiences must place the safety of the youth and adult participants as a priority. These experiences are those which will result in life long memories for those who will participate and, therefore, must be prepared carefully; organization is key.
- Be up to date on media of the area. In preparing for your trip, check the news media blitz on the region or area to ensure the safety of the area at the time of the mission trip.
- Prepare all adult volunteers. An orientation of expectations of adult volunteers as well as appropriate behavior with youth should be conducted prior to the event.
- Develop A Mission Statement. As with any endeavor as important and complex as a Mission trip to another diocese, it is important to establish a Mission Statement that defines what the trip is intended to accomplish. Defining the trip should come after meetings and in close collaboration with the leaders of the parish abroad. Developing this Mission Statement should be the responsibility of the parish mission team, which has also had the vision for the trip.

Code of Conduct

- A code of conduct should be developed for each trip with well-defined expectations and consequences for actions that do not follow these guidelines.

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Youth Mission Trip Policies and Procedures (Cont).

Documentation, Identification, Parental Consent, Liability Waiver, and Medical Waiver

- All participants should have a picture identification card such as a Texas Driver's License.
- Liability and Medical Releases must be obtained for each participant (youth and adult). Additionally, each young person must have the proper Parental Consent Form completed.
- All forms must be notarized.
- Copies of all documentation for participants and leaders should be kept in a binder and taken to all visitation sites by the trip coordinator.
- Copies of all documentation must be left with the appropriate parish/school official in case of emergencies.

Incident Report

- Should there be any incident of misconduct, emergency, or other situation documentation should be kept (See page 80-81 of the CYM Handbook).

Itinerary

- Pastor/Principal, parents, and key staff should be provided a detailed itinerary.
 - Name and location of housing
 - Daily schedule
 - Emergency contact name and phone number
 - Cell phone number of the coordinator or an adult volunteer

Resources

- Contact the Office of Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization