

Why Short-Term Mission Immersions?

(Adapted from *Mission Trips – Why Do We Go?* by Matt Rousso)

*“[M]ission is not just a matter of **doing things for** people. It is first of all a matter of **being with** people, of listening to and sharing with them.” – Donal Dorr*

What is a Short-Term Immersion?

An encounter, lasting anywhere from one week to one year, with people and realities in the developing world

Our Cultural Context

Often the first question asked by interested participants is “What are we going to do?” That we are first concerned with “doing” is quite understandable: our culture and spirituality has formed us from our earliest days to see our significance in terms of what we do. However, when entering into another culture, we cannot presume to have all of the answers or solutions. Perhaps we should first ask ourselves, “Why do we go?”

For Our Own Conversion

Our significance as persons comes not simply from what we do, but from who we are. And so it is that, in the first instance, going into mission is not to help others or to teach others. Rather, it is for nothing less than for the sake of conversion – but not the conversion of those to whom we go; it is for our own conversion! This conversion entails a fundamental change in the way that I view my own life – what I do, what I have, who I count as friends, what questions I ask myself, what issues I pay attention to, who and what I give my allegiance to.

In Yearning to See Anew

Richard Rohr in his book, *Simplicity*, says that, like the blind man in the Gospel, we need to yearn to see anew. And for this new sight, he says *“You have to run with your own feet to some place you haven’t been before – to a new place. You have to leave the world where you have everything under control... You have to head into a world where you are poor and powerless. And there you will be converted, despite yourself.”* Mission trips are about creating an opening for seeing and listening and hearing in ways that we are not easily able to do at home.

Answering a Call to Solidarity

The short-term mission trip forms the beginnings of a deep, lasting bond. In seeing anew the hopes and struggles of our brothers and sisters in the developing world, we begin to understand our role as their friends and advocates. We are not simply called to offer our neighbor charity but to engage in deep solidarity. On mission trips we enter into friendships which can move us to live differently; to act on their behalf with a certain passion for justice issues.

Matt Rousso is Maryknoll Mission Educator in New Orleans, Louisiana. This Mission Education ministry is dedicated to two inter-related tasks: first, we want to build a knowledge of the peoples of other lands - their problems and aspirations for truth, freedom, justice and peace; and secondly, we strive to evoke Christian solidarity and cooperation with these people as cherished brothers and sisters.