

## A Process for Discerning a Call to Global Mission

### ***A Call to Mission Engagement***

Being a missionary is being a Christian; it is what defines who we are. Stepping out in mission can be one of the most exciting and transformational life experiences in our faith journey, changing the course of our life and ministry. Not everyone is called to mission in another cultural context in another part of the world, and of those who are called to global mission, not everyone is called to be a leader. However, if you feel that you are attracted to engaging in short- or long-term mission, be open to the possibility that God might be calling you in this direction.

The first step in the journey of discernment is to examine yourself, your spiritual life, your work life, your community life. Knowing who you are and what makes you tick is the first step in understanding how you are called to participate in God's mission in the world.

Discernment may be done alone or in a group. It is always a good idea to seek wise counsel during any process of discernment, particularly for long-term mission, with your Christian community, pastor or trusted Christian friends.



### **1) Begin with a Prayer for Discernment**

*"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." Thomas Merton, "Thoughts in Solitude".*



### **2) Ask yourself: What kind of person am I? Do I avoid uncomfortable situations? Do I tend to need predictability in my life?**

There will be things that will challenge you and make you feel uncomfortable, and the last thing that any of us can expect on a mission trip is predictability. That's not to say that there won't be a little bit of anxiety about the travel, what you'll be doing, where you'll be staying, and so forth. Those are normal. What's important, though, is how you'll deal with that anxiety and the confusion that arises when things turn out differently than you expected. Those who already have some experience with international travel, are fairly comfortable in cross-cultural interactions, and can handle occasional unexpected or unusual situations are often well-suited to global mission.



### **3) Is this the right time in my life?**

Of course, there are always things that can, and will, get in the way if we let them. We should not let the routine things of life prevent us from engaging in global mission. But if your family is experiencing financial hardship, your employer will be reluctant to give you the needed time off, a family member has a significant illness, or you have just experienced a major life event - then you will need to spend some time in prayer talking with God and some time in discussion with your family and/or Christian community to discern whether or not this is the right time for you to engage in God's mission in the world.

### **4) Where am I in my life journey?**

Global mission engagement is an act of faith and also a response to a particular sense of God's plan for our lives and for the world. Mission is not a vacation, a way to live in a particular location, a way to fill a vacuum in our life, a way to run away from relationships, burn-out, failure, reality, or from oneself or God. Responding to a global disaster or being caught up in a recent issue are also not necessarily indicators that we are called to mission. Ideally, we will have a healthy and pervading intuition that this may be the next step in our faith journey.

### **5) Where am I in my faith, what are my spiritual motivations for mission? ...or more simply, why am I going?**

Spend some time thinking carefully about this question. Be mindful that mission is about serving God as opposed to making us feel good or going on an exciting trip to an interesting destination. Experiencing a sense that compels us to step out in the world in faith, feeling spiritually drawn to engage with our brothers and sisters in Christ in another place in the world, and feeling compelled to go in a spirit of servanthood are all pretty good reasons to feel that God might be calling us into mission engagement.

### **6) Am I qualified?**

We are all qualified; part of mission discernment is identifying a mission partner, a place to serve. If God is calling you, doors will usually open. This may be to service in your local community or the other side of the world. All calls are equally valid and valued. So the question isn't whether or not you're qualified, but rather what are your gifts and into what aspect of God's mission in the world are you called.

### **7) Am I willing to work at developing relationships?**

Short-term mission trips are ideal for communities and congregations wanting to develop relationships with one another. Primarily, these ministries should be about nurturing relationships ...in other words, your mission trip should be more about "being" than "doing." While that rolls off the tongue quite easily, it's surprising how many people find that challenging. If we are solely focusing on a church, school or housing project, the well we plan to dig, the clinic in which we plan to work, we may find it difficult to be intentional about developing relationships. We are seeking the face of Christ as well as being the face of Christ to others. Think about what mutuality and partnership in a relationship will look like from your personal (or mission team's) perspective and from that of the community in which you would be serving. How will you go about developing that relationship and nurturing it after you return?





## 8) Am I willing to take my time?

Discernment of a call to mission generally requires at least a few weeks, months or occasionally even years (in the case of long-term mission) rather than a “bolt of lightning”. It is normal to continue to feel a few lingering reservations and doubts even after a period of discernment. If, on the other hand, you have a sudden, overwhelming and urgent desire to travel to a new mission field and are already checking ticket prices online, (particularly in response to a disaster), this is rarely a true call to mission. Feeling rushed to make a decision may be a red flag that you should slow down and take some time to test your discernment. If possible, set aside a few quiet hours, a full day or a weekend retreat for intentional prayer. Listen carefully to where the Holy Spirit might be leading you.



## 9) How should I start?

Once you have discerned a call, and it's a “go”, it is generally best to start small. Build the experience and skills that you will need to be successful in trip planning, trip participation/leadership and partnership development. Here are some guidelines:

- If you have travel experience but have never participated in a mission trip, consider contacting one of GEMN's Partner Organizations, many of whom have structured short-term mission opportunities. Larger dioceses and churches in your area may also have groups who are planning a trip and would welcome you to join them. A one- to two-week trip with an experienced organization or mission trip leader can be powerfully transformational and ignite a life-long passion for mission.
- If you have taken a mission trip or two and want a more immersive experience, explore volunteering for a few weeks or months, a summer, or a semester with an established organization or with a companion diocese. GEMN is happy to provide guidance and contacts ([gemn@gemn.org](mailto:gemn@gemn.org)) if you are interested in doing this.
- After a few shorter-term mission trips or perhaps some experience living abroad, you may feel a serious call to service as a long-term missionary (one or more years). The best approach is to undergo a more extensive discernment process and to be in contact with the Mission Personnel Office of The Episcopal Church ([www.episcopalchurch.org/page/mission-personnel](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/mission-personnel)). This group can provide assistance with discernment, orientation, planning and fundraising that will be immensely helpful in putting the supports in place to produce a successful long-term mission placement. Young adults, 21 to 30 years old, may also be interested in exploring a one-year placement with the Young Adult Service Corps or YASC ([www.episcopalchurch.org/page/young-adult-service-corps](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/young-adult-service-corps)). Application deadlines usually occur around the first of each year for this program.

## 10) Start planning

Good planning can help you get the most out of your trip. Glance at some of the resources and tools on our GEMN [Global Mission Resources Page](#) to get started and talk to as many experienced missionaries as possible. We wish you God's blessing as you allow God to use you in exploring your call to global mission.

