



Guidelines for Volunteers

This document is adapted from guidelines that were originally provided by Episcopal Relief & Development to groups traveling to El Salvador. They are also applicable to volunteers traveling in most other regions of the world. As such, they offer some useful advice for travelers preparing to depart from the United States.

While Volunteering at a Work Site in an International Context:

1. Please **DO** bring your address and emergency phone numbers with you wherever you go.
2. Please **DO** carry a **copy** of your passport on you at all times.
3. Please **DO NOT** wear expensive jewelry or watches or carry expensive items that you don't need.
4. Please **DO NOT** leave the group without advising someone else.
5. Please **DO NOT** give money or other donations to people at the worksite. If Americans give gifts to people at the worksite, it creates the expectation that all Americans will give them gifts, and that opens the door to begging. This can then be uncomfortable for future volunteers and endangers the integrity and sustainability of local initiatives.
6. Please **DO NOT** accept gifts of food from anyone but staff associated with your trip. Food often carries bacteria that American stomachs are not used to digesting.
7. Please **DO NOT** promise things to people you meet on a worksite. If you see someone with a condition or in a situation with which you would like to offer help, first speak to a member of the project team or the sponsoring local organization about the advisability of this. If appropriate, arrange how best to assist.
8. Please **BE AWARE** that you will see poverty that may upset you. In general, giving a few dollars will not benefit the recipient. It will only help to alleviate your feelings of upset and guilt. If you would like to help, please seek organizations working locally to create systemic solutions that address the root causes of the problem.
9. Please **BE AWARE** that you are a guest in a foreign country. As such, be mindful of different cultural expectations, and **DO NOT** seek to direct your surroundings. You are encouraged to enter in as volunteers in service, and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.
10. Please **BE AWARE** that if you are involved with a project, every project staff person or local coordinator has duties and responsibilities that may include caring for beneficiaries, paying for materials and labor, finding materials, directing workers, meeting with government officials, architects and engineers, and overseeing the many disputes that come up in the community. Please **BE PATIENT** with his or her ability to respond immediately to volunteer requests.