

Building Hope:  
The Role of Short-Term Missions  
in Transformational Development

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For my daughter, Sophia Joy,  
who began this journey with me in the womb and  
joined me in Europe to see it completed on her first birthday.

I hope mommy made you proud.

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## I. Preface

On a barren mountainside near the U.S.-Mexico border lived the Guzman Ochoa family in a tiny shack made of old wooden walls, a tarp roof, and a dirt floor that flooded when it rained. Without running water or electricity, father Erick, mother Josefina, and their two small children used just one bucket of water a day given to them by their neighbor for washing and lit candles at night for studying. Despite Erick's commitment to his job six days a week as a security guard, the family still struggled to survive. Regardless of her shame, Josefina asked God in utter desperation to give her strength as she picked through the trash to gather discarded food or clothing items for her family ("Mexican Family"). Every day, the couple dreamed of a better life for their children and their dire situation radically changed when a group of foreigners volunteered with Youth With A Mission (YWAM) San Diego/Baja to build them a new home. While they were thrilled with the dramatic change to their living situation, the emotional and spiritual impact of the event sparked a transformation that continues impacting their lives and other families in Mexico today.

After applying and qualifying to receive a house from YWAM's Homes of Hope ministry, the Guzman Ochoa family worked alongside a short-term missions (STM) team of Canadian college students who devoted two days of labor to their family's house construction. Josefina fondly remembered the encouragement she received from the STM team members and how meaningful her participation was:

[Our participation] is an important part [of the build] because you can see something that you thought you couldn't do yourself, but there is great motivation when they tell you, "you can paint, you can do this." With the whole team, seeing how all together we can do

it, that really motivates you and you think “I can do it too”. I remember that a lot of them invited us to paint, saying “come on, let’s paint over here.”

As the walls of the sixteen-by-twenty-foot house were raised, Josefina knew she would never forget this life-changing event and wished that the day would never end. She was surprised by how quickly a cement floor, a shingled roof, three windows and a door transformed her family’s life and made her feel connected with the visiting group. But, just as the STM team started getting comfortable using their broken Spanish, the next day they packed up and said *adios*, leaving the family with a fully-furnished house, groceries for a month, and the hope of a better future ahead.

At this point, many STM beneficiaries like the Guzman Ochoa family quickly become a distant memory to the foreigners who invested their time and money to help them. Though this family was greatly impacted by material gifts they received, it was the motivation from the STM team and ongoing discipleship from a YWAM missionary after receiving their house that generated long-term transformation in the Erick and Josefina’s lives. Andrea East, who referred the family to Homes of Hope after learning about their situation during a community outreach, continued visiting them in their new house. Erick described their interactions after the STM team left:

Andrea started coming about every fifteen days and she asked us how we were doing, how our situation was changing. This really encouraged us, because we saw that it was not just the organization that gave us a house, but that afterward, this friendship continued. For us, we really value that. Sometimes, when someone gives you something, they just give it to you and that’s it, maybe because they liked you or because you touched their heart. However, Andrea kept on coming to visit and that showed us that we

were really important to her as a family, as people. That is what motivated us, to think, “wow, there are people that really care about us.”

Andrea’s visits continued for several months and, while she rarely brought donations to the family, she addressed their emotional needs and spiritual inquiries through meaningful conversations. Josefina shared about how the time investment that Andrea made meant so much to her:

God put it in her heart to share that time with us. Sometimes we give gifts to someone, but when we give our time, it is something that is so valuable. Andrea left her work behind and spent time with us. The visits were very much about asking us how we were doing, it was always a good time, like she was part of the family. We really trusted her and we felt we could share with her. Whenever there was a question, she always shared about God in the right moment. She was always motivating us, like “you can keep going, you can do it.” When we needed someone with us to not feel lonely, we could say, “there is someone who cares about my life, who wants me to keep moving forward, who wants me to have a different life.”

At this point, the family’s physical poverty had become a secondary concern to building up their emotional state and spiritual lives. Andrea’s relationship with the Erick and Josefina went deeper than a donor providing material goods to the poor; she aimed to help them overcome their internal poverty resulting from broken relationships with God, self, and neighbor.

This first-hand narrative also exemplifies the collectivist nature of the Mexican culture and reiterates the importance that beneficiaries of STM trips place on relationships over tasks.

Erick recalled this about Andrea’s visits after their house build:

She came and was interested and concerned about us and what we were going through, our situation. She didn't just arrive to say, "let's see, what are you lacking?" In that case, I would just think she is coming to provide for my needs. We saw that support, but emotionally, because she always arrived to ask us, "how are you?"

Andrea's relational approach to discipleship reflects a holistic view of poverty, as she focused her time wholeheartedly on addressing the family's social, emotional and spiritual needs, rather than just their physical ones. This relationship-based ministry that happened as the result of a short-term trip has produced long-term change in the Guzman Ochoa family.

Although they did not know much about God prior to their house build, Andrea's gentle encouragement led Josefina and Erick to join a local Christian church, where they were eventually baptized. Later, Josefina attended an evening class at the YWAM base called *Escuela Nocturna Vida Abundante* ("Abundant Life Night School" in Spanish), where she studied the Bible and aspects about Christian living. Later, their family felt challenged to put their faith into practice and depend on God for provision to attend YWAM's five-month discipleship course, followed by a three-month class on community development at the YWAM campus. Currently, Erick and Josefina work as full-time staff at YWAM Tijuana, where they serve with the same ministry that gave them a home, interviewing and visiting other potential beneficiaries with the Homes of Hope family selection team.

Reflecting on what their lives would have been like if Andrea had never returned to visit them after their house build, Erick commented, "I think we would just be another one of the bunch, just another family built for, where their lives continue as normal. What impacted us was the follow-up, the friendship that we made with Andrea, the motivation that she gave." That inspiration extended into their neighborhood, when Erick and Josefina started a Bible study in

their new house. Because the family had received so much – physically, emotionally, and spiritually – they begin to recognize the needs of those around them and believed they could do something for them. Josefina explained her motivation to help her neighbors:

I always remember past times when God was so good with us and when we see people in difficult situations, we always believe they can do something. We always see their potential, what they can do, what they can accomplish, we don't focus on the problem, but from the outside, we can see what they could do. More than anything, that is what motivates us to motivate others.

Indeed, the Guzman Ochoa family did not end up as some STM beneficiaries do, recipients of a physical blessing that lacks a long-term impact in their lives. Instead, the invitation to participate alongside the STM team that built their house, Andrea's holistic approach to poverty alleviation, and her strategy to invest into an ongoing relationship with the family changed the course of Erick and Josefina's lives. Their transformation consequently motivates them to help others reach their own potential, multiplying the impact of the STM trip even further as they work together with the local church and YWAM to disciple other families in need.

## II. Introduction

“I feel like I got more out of this experience than the poor family did,” is a common sentiment shared by many deeply-touched foreign participants during the Homes of Hope team debrief sessions. This honest declaration results from an emotional reaction to their contribution of the enormous gift that helped transform the lives of a family in need. Short-term missions (STM) experiences are known for this type of transformative effect on their participants. Upon



returning from a STM trip, students have changed their majors, professionals have quit their jobs to start non-profit organizations, and families have sold their homes to join the mission full-time.

But what about the beneficiaries of their work? Once the STM trip is over, what impact remains locally of the team's time abroad? Despite the time spent fundraising and planning, the financial investment, and the physical work that go into the experience, the impact of short-term missions on local beneficiaries may only last as long as the trip itself. While much investigation has been conducted regarding the impact that STM trips have on team participants, there is limited research regarding what elements of a short-term foreign mission experience contribute to long-term development for local beneficiaries. By having an amplified view of poverty and a deeper understanding of local culture, short-term missions (STM) teams can contribute to long-term development by focusing on relationship-based activities that enhance the voice of the poor and empower beneficiaries to participate in their own development.

Foreign teams can incorporate several principles of development into their STM trip to make it more meaningful for local beneficiaries. First, team members should consider the complex nature of poverty, recognizing that it goes much deeper than a lack of material goods, and adjust their plan of action accordingly. Next, visitors to a foreign country should acquire a basic understanding of the cultural context that they are entering, regardless of the limited amount of time they will be there. For example, one important aspect for engaging in culturally-appropriate missions work is to recognize that "individualist countries tend to be rich, while collectivist countries tend to be poor," the former representing mostly sending nations and the latter, countries who receive missionaries (Hofstede 93). STM experiences can therefore have a deeper impact when they include more collectivist activities for beneficiaries, such as

relationship-building with the foreign volunteers as well as with their fellow community members.

STM participants can also seek to discover what assets are available within the community where they are serving and then intentionally involve community members in the work they plan to do. This appreciation of capital and inclusion of residents will enhance the motivation for local participation in development work in the future. Missions work done *with* the poor rather than *for* the poor enhances dignity and promotes relational equality, as “parity is a higher form of charity” (Lupton 37). Short-term missions that generates transformation should incorporate culturally-appropriate respectful relationships with local beneficiaries and engage them in such a way that residents have the confidence to continue using their own assets to bring ongoing development in their community after the team returns home.

### III. Positionality and Explanation of Terms

For the purpose of this thesis, phrases like “foreign team members” or “STM participants” refer to residents of the developed world, more specifically United States citizens, who travel abroad as a part of a short-term mission trip. Since I am writing from the standpoint of someone on the mission field living among the local residents, Western visitors are considered “foreigners” in this thesis. Any mention of “local residents,” “community members,” or “STM beneficiaries” is a reference to residents of the country receiving these STM teams, also referred to as the “host nation,” mainly in the developing or Third World. I recognize that my own worldview as a First World citizen influences my opinions regarding the topics presented. However, I endeavor to remain respectful throughout, neither glorifying nor belittling any country, culture or people discussed.

I am writing from the viewpoint of a full-time volunteer missionary in Mexico with Youth With A Mission San Diego/Baja. Youth With A Mission (YWAM) is an international, interdenominational Christian mission organization with over 1,000 ministry centers worldwide that are united with the central vision to know God and make him known. With three operating locations along the U.S.-Mexico border, YWAM San Diego/Baja aims to “engage a broken world with God’s generosity” (Lambert 6). Their main ministry is Homes of Hope (HOH), a program that connects foreign short-term volunteer teams with low-income Mexican families to provide them with a new home. The appendix portion of this thesis offers an in-depth description of Homes of Hope, as well as several suggestions and documents that have the potential to enhance the transformative impact of this ministry according to the research presented here. These proposals can also be generalized and subsequently altered to apply to other STM experiences, expanding their use for other mission agencies.

Sean Lambert, founder of YWAM San Diego/Baja, and his international team of Christian volunteers have been serving in the northern Baja region of Mexico for more than twenty-five years. They started this mission enterprise with the desire to disciple and mobilize people “to Mexico and beyond to serve the needs of the poor, both practically and spiritually” (“About YWAM”). Lambert and his family began bringing short-term teams of youth from Los Angeles to Tijuana, Mexico in the late 1980’s to do evangelism and mercy ministry. In 1990, one of his teams built a house for a needy family in a very poor area of the city. After this, his three-year-old daughter, Andrea (from the Guzman Ochoa’s family story) asked if they were going to build a house for the neighbor family as well and in this way, “Homes of Hope” was born. Since these humble beginnings, over 100,000 individuals have volunteered to build more than 5,300 homes for the poor with this ministry. The reach of the HOH program has also

expanded to include twenty other countries. The recommendations offered in the appendix of this thesis are specifically for the benefit of the Homes of Hope program in Tijuana, Mexico, though some of the information may apply to other contexts and ministries.

My involvement with YWAM San Diego/Baja began as a member of a STM team with little knowledge of the organization, the Mexican culture, or the lifestyle of the Mexican families prior to receiving a home from this organization. However, participation in the life-changing event of giving a poor family a much-needed shelter inspired me to dedicate a decade of missionary service in the border town of Tijuana thus far. When I joined staff with YWAM, I was trained in the HOH program as a host and translator for the foreign teams that came to build houses. Shortly after, I took on an additional role with the HOH team to interview and conduct home visits for potential recipient families. Eventually, my work expanded to include leadership of an after-school tutoring program for children in a community where more than fifty HOH homes were built. My team served for five years with these HOH recipients and their neighbors, seeing first-hand the transformation that a new home brought to many families.

For this thesis, in addition to insight gained as an active practitioner on the mission field, I conducted a series of interviews with those involved in Homes of Hope in Tijuana, including full-time YWAM staff, past foreign participants, and Mexican beneficiaries. Given that the people in each group are highly invested in and impacted by the house builds, it was necessary to include their diverse points of view in my investigation. This qualitative research was done with the purpose of “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam and Tisdell 6). Hearing first-hand accounts of transformation as well as dreams for future work in HOH communities highlighted to me the various factors of STM trips that can contribute to long-term development

work in host nations. From there, I completed extensive scholarly research to arrive at the conclusions found in this thesis, while still valuing the voices of the individuals represented here.

Out of compassion for those who were suffering and from a desire to live out my faith in a practical way, I entered the mission field with a sympathetic heart towards the poor ready to act. But as evidenced by the growing movement in world missions and the expanding secular foreign aid industry, “having a heart for the poor isn’t hard. Having a mind for the poor, that’s the challenge” (Matheson Miller). Many people, Christian or not, wish to engage with the poor in some way short-term, but very few have considered the long-term implications of their work on the recipient communities. My hope is that this thesis will prompt STM participants to rethink their strategies and actions, and that members of receiving nations will insist that they do, so that these trips may generate long-term development of the countries where they serve.

#### IV. Overview of Short-Term Missions

Short-term mission (STM) is defined by Roger Peterson et al. as “the God-commanded, repetitive deployment of swift, temporary non-professional missionaries” (117). In contrast to long-term commitments made by individuals and families to move abroad for an undetermined length of time common in previous centuries, STM is a recent phenomenon that offers the opportunity for any Christian to take part in the Great Commission in a variety of contexts. Participants in STM trips are now able to share the Good News in foreign countries without the need to completely leave behind their families, homes and jobs for an extended period. John R. Crawford asserts that rapid travel and increasing communication across the world are transforming missions work because “many people who formerly would not have dreamed of being missionaries have undertaken short-term missions of all sorts, in all kinds of places” (338).

Although STM work is, by definition, done on a temporary basis, the impact of this type

of service has long-term implications for the local beneficiaries and the host countries. In fact, STM teams should seriously consider the consequences - both positive and negative - of their service to the poor. The non-professional aspect of STM work does not imply the freedom to work without wisdom and consideration towards local hosts and beneficiaries. It also should not excuse problems that arise on the mission field as a result of a lack of cultural intelligence on behalf of foreign team members. Instead, individuals and churches who invest in short-term missions should seriously consider the implications of their work in order to ensure a positive sustainable impact from their efforts.

With a long-term strategy in mind, the apostle Paul engaged in STM as an important part of bringing the Gospel to a broken world. Though his work shows that he was a career missionary in the New Testament, Paul's approach to ministry focused mainly on short-term visits that produced lifelong disciples. The book of Acts indicates that Paul was constantly changing his location, never spending more than a few years in the same place and, on some occasions, just a few weeks. While his preaching and teaching was temporary in each city, a church was established in many of the places he visited. Paul's commitment to partnering with local Christians contributed to the long-term impact of his work because local leadership continued with the ministry after he moved on. He also stayed in contact with the churches he planted through letters, friends, or subsequent visits. His strategy of building up and entrusting locals with continuing ministry efforts is a rare yet important relational approach that can be employed with foreign STM teams today.

In the twenty-first century, STM is growing in popularity among Christians as a way to engage in God's mission to redeem the world, especially with today's youth. Priest and Priest report that "1.5 million U.S. Christians travel abroad every year on short-term mission trips," the

majority of this number representing young adults and teens (54). These cross-cultural experiences are of great benefit for youth emerging as the next generation of Christian leaders, helping them to acquire a valuable understanding about the world outside of their own circle of influence. Priest and Priest assert that, “when racism or prejudice or poverty and wealth are considered, the issues are not distant, abstract reflections from the suburbs or the beach or a retreat center. Rather reflection occurs in the very context of relationship with people of other ethnic or racial groups, people themselves often struggling with poverty” (61).

In an increasingly globalized world, STM trips provide a platform for Christian youth to have more exposure to, and involvement with, the issues that their global neighbors face. As a result of STM trips, poverty and injustice no longer remain theoretical issues confronted by faceless individuals in faraway lands. Instead, the understanding that comes as a result of relationships built on the mission field leads to empathy and identification with the poor, which can then spur on further action and involvement.

Although it seems that the volunteer spirit in America has diminished because of the reduced number of people serving on a weekly basis, in fact people of all ages are increasingly seeking out voluntary service in STM trips (Priest and Priest 58-59). While people are now less likely to take part in local service commitments that require a few hours a week, Americans are giving up blocks of vacation time to serve the poor abroad to a greater extent than in the past. Most STM agencies can attest to a surge of volunteers during spring break, summer, Thanksgiving and Christmas season, confirming this trend. The relative ease of travel and the desire to become a more global citizen also contributes to the increase in STM participation. This growth in participation also implies an increase in responsibility to understand the people and

context where they are serving, as well as the long-term implications of their work for communities abroad.

Much of the research done about STM looks into the impact of these trips on foreign volunteers. Service trips abroad are such an enriching experience for the foreign participants that it is considered that their focus is “largely 80% what they receive from the experience and about 20% what the hosting ministry receives” (Priest 85-86). Positive reports from enthusiastic participants upon returning home spur on more involvement from church members and service-minded individuals. In fact, the growing concern among Western Christians about global issues such as HIV/AIDS, sex trafficking, sweat shops, and refugees can be attributed in part to increased participation in STM. As more Christians from the First World travel to foreign countries, they expand their learning through their service, discover more about the realities their Third World neighbors face, and are motivated by what they experienced abroad to become a catalyst for change at home.

The concept of *voluntourism* has been associated with STM recently since, “like many tourists, short-term missionaries seek new experiences, personal transformation, and a broader understanding of the world” (Occhipinti 258). This increasingly popular form of travel combines an international trip with a service component, although there is not always a spiritual element in this case. In his article, “Short-Term Mission as Pilgrimage,” Wesley claims that the increased involvement in STM reveals the inner journey that many people are on in this generation. He brings into question whether or not the purpose of STM is truly to seek the salvation of others or instead to create an experience where participants are able to “find a way to work out their own salvation as they journeyed” (6). STM may indeed be branded correctly as a pilgrimage for the



participants, but they should also consider their trip as part of the longer and broader journey that the local community members are on as well.

Too often, STM teams do not have a conscious sense of the fact that God is already at work among the people that they feel called to go and serve. Good-hearted visitors travel to underdeveloped nations with the notion that they must take God to the people, subtly implying he is not there yet. However, it is the STM participants who are the new players in the community narrative, entering into an ongoing story that God began long ago among a people that he dearly loves. It is possible that local residents do not recognize God's hand at work among them, but that only adds to the important task of the missionary team to help them discern God's influence in their community.

Despite what STM teams may unknowingly assume about their presence in a community, they are joining God's eternal work that is already in progress. Bryant L Myers, author of *Walking with the Poor*, offers this perspective:

The transformational development story belongs to the community. It was the community's story before we came and it will be the community's story long after we leave. While our story has something to offer to the community's story, we must never forget that, at the end of the day, this is not *our* story . . . When we usurp their story, we add to their poverty. (112)

Forgetting or failing to recognize this basic truth about the omnipresent God at work among the local people can actually contribute to their poverty, as it may reinforce the unbiblical belief that God has forgotten or abandoned them. When STM participants recognize that they are part of God's larger mission, their work can be done with a humbler, less ethnocentric perspective.

STM trip participants normally focus their service on the poor, reaching out in a variety of ways. Foreign volunteers engage with the most vulnerable of society at orphanages, garbage dumps, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, nursing homes, and low-income communities across the world. Depending on the context in which the team serves, STM teams may build homes, schools, or latrines and provide services such as medical care and English classes. These common activities offer foreign volunteers the chance to serve in ways that are easy for them to prepare for and jump into upon arrival. However, these plans are often formulated by outsiders with little or no input from local people in the host countries. STM trips seem to focus mainly on completing a project or having a large variety of experiences in their host country in the shortest period of time possible.

Many short-term teams give the impression to local hosts that they only want to do their plans, plans that were made without any input from knowledgeable people on the field. The current task-based model of STM can send the local missionaries serving long-term in the community into a whirlwind of activity searching for a school to paint or a bathroom to build per the request of the foreign team coming to visit. This strategy shows little or no consideration as to how STM activities relate to the ongoing ministry of those already on the field. When the voices of local hosts are not heard by STM teams, possible negative encounters result due to a lack of familiarity with the country and culture where they serve. In an interview with a Japanese host for STM teams, she explained: “They make their own decisions. If we have the same opinion that is great, but when we don’t, we are the weaker ones. They are the ones spending a lot of money and they want to have a say . . . The main focus is them” (Barber 313). This attitude widens the gap between foreigners and locals and can create tension or confusion between these groups. It also perpetuates the negative belief of STM as voluntourism, as “STM

guests may view their hosts, not as equals, but as impersonal facilitators of the STM's agenda, and therefore make little effort to understand cultural differences so they can act appropriately" (Barber 314).

As the STM movement continues to gain momentum around the world, it is imperative that participants consider the long-term effects of their work. While short-term teams continue making their experiences the main focus of these trips without recognizing their place in God's broader story, they inevitably will miss out on the opportunity for their time to have a more profound and lasting impact. Listening to local hosts as to when, where, and how to do STM can greatly increase the effectiveness of these trips. Open and honest communication about the expectations of both groups is necessary to clarify the common "disconnect between what the hosts perceive the role of STM guests to be and what the guests believe about their role," resulting in a better experience for everyone involved (Barber 310). Also, having more insight into the issues that the poor face and the cultural context where they serve will allow STM participants to invest their time into activities that are more strategic and valuable to the long-term development of local residents and the host country.

## V. Complex Nature of Poverty

STM volunteers sign up for cross-cultural trips because they believe that God through them can bring about change – physical or otherwise - in people's lives. The immense nature of global poverty should not be so overwhelming that we forget about the omnipotent God that works to save all mankind and desires his will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven" (*Holy Bible*, Matthew 6:10). For example, a report from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development claims that by 2030, nearly half a billion people will still remain below the poverty line, earning just \$1.25 a day ("OECD States of Fragility 2015"). However, Christians

can trust that because of God's hand at work in our world through poverty alleviation efforts, including STM trips, this prediction may never become a reality. In fact, the worldwide poverty rate was cut in half between 1990 and 2010 and, although around 10 percent of the global population still live on less than \$2 a day, that amount is down 35 percent from 1990 ("Poverty"). Therefore, the numbers regarding poverty should not deter us from our work, but inspire us to continue on, knowing that the Spirit who lives in us is greater than the spirit who lives in the world (*Holy Bible*, 1 John 4:4).

Our understanding of transformational development and the methods used to accomplish it are largely determined by how we define poverty and why we believe people are poor. The abundance of both macro and micro systemic factors that contribute to poverty make it a highly complex social issue involving all areas of life: physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual. A complete discussion about the vast causes of poverty is neither within the scope of this thesis nor necessary in preparing for an effective STM trip. Understandably, because the current understanding of poverty by the majority of STM participants is shallow and simplistic, so are their teams' interventions on the mission field. However, attaining a basic understanding of the complexity of poverty is essential for short-term workers.

A short but useful overview of some important factors that contribute to individual and national poverty is found in Ronald Sider's book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. He asserts that "personal sinful choices and complex social structures cause poverty. So do misguided cultural ideas, natural and human disasters and lack of appropriate technology" (119). Environmental calamities and ecological exploitation caused by human actors play a role as well. The practice known as "toxic colonialism," where First World countries continually dump their garbage and toxic waste on less-developed countries, "drain a country's resources and poison its

ability to produce resources in the future” (Pellow 14). Additionally, in a global market where the primary objective of companies is to make a profit, Third World nations can easily fall deep into poverty and remain under the effective control of industrialized nations.

Exposure to basic information about the complex nature of poverty is vital to enhance understanding so that STM volunteers may formulate a more appropriate approach for their brief contribution abroad. The great majority of First World believers, however, have “allowed the values of our affluent materialistic society to shape our thinking and acting towards the poor” (Sider 63). Undoubtedly, consumerism has completely penetrated all aspects of Western culture, including the Christian church. Not only has it shaped our thinking, but it nearly completely dictates our view of poverty and, consequently, our response to the poor. As evidence of this, the most common explanation of poverty among STM teams relates almost exclusively to material deficit; that is, someone lacking the most necessary physical things for survival, like food, water, and shelter, is considered to be “poor.” Accordingly, when STM teams travel to serve the poor, they mainly aim to provide things to the people who are lacking them. This materialistic mindset and reaction represents a superficial and simplistic, single-faceted view of poverty. When conducted in this manner, STM work reestablishes a worldview that internalizes an “Us versus Them” distinction, where the poor (them) are seen as deficient individuals who need the money, goods, services, and supervision of (us) foreigners to become whole human beings.

Overly generous giving lures the giver into a trap of developing a god-complex, even on a subconscious level. This occurs when the non-poor inadvertently “succumb to the temptation to play god in the lives of the poor” by meddling in areas of life that are outside their scope of influence or overstepping boundaries (Myers 124). In STM service, the impulse commonly

exists to give something away that is perceived as needed and simply take God out of the situation. Yet, Christians should serve the poor in a way that demonstrates that “every good and perfect gift comes from above,” displaying dependence on an almighty God for all of life’s provisions (*Holy Bible*, James 1:17). People serving on the mission field, whether short-term or long-term, must never forget to act out of the basic truth that God is the one who ultimately provides for all man’s needs and that he is able to transform the people and their situation in the communities where they work.

A case study done of STM teams participating in house construction efforts in Honduras reflects how foreigners devalue the people they traveled so far to help by remaining too focused on providing for the physical needs of the poor. When interviewed, Honduran beneficiaries frequently commented on all that they had learned from the foreign team members. At the same time, “the Hondurans also said they believed they had nothing to teach their North American visitors. Project recipients did not feel valued, and the learning felt one-sided” (Ver Beek 481). In this case, and in many other STM experiences, the attempt to alleviate the physical poverty of the people actually reinforced a deeper, psychological poverty of which the foreigners were seemingly unaware.

When the concept of poverty as physical deficiency leads to a psychological poverty, it can damage the personal identity of the poor and perpetuate a worldview that internalizes their insufficiency. This poverty of being comes as the result of a lifetime of suffering, where the poor feel excluded, inferior and devalued by outsiders who look at them and only see them as people living in want. When the poor believe that they are *meant* to be poor, a fatalistic attitude inhibits them from seeking something better for themselves and their children. If they think that they *deserve* to be poor, it is because they do not yet understand the intrinsic value God has

given them as his image-bearers. Such mindsets perpetuate generational poverty and makes it difficult, but not impossible, for families and communities to overcome.

Apart from macrosystemic issues and the marred personal identity just discussed, a more comprehensive and holistic view of poverty also takes into account the impact of broken relationships. Myers explains that “poverty is a result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all its meanings” (86). Because of sin, mankind is not able to live in right relationship with others, with self, with the environment, or with God as he intended. These unjust relationships keep human beings from experiencing the fullness that their Creator has for them. If our relationships were as God meant for them to be, the world would be replete with loving families, fulfilling work, flourishing communities, and glorious worship.

Corbett and Fikkert, authors of *When Helping Hurts*, describe a life where we live in right relationship with God, neighbor, self and creation like this:

We experience deep communion with a loving God; we understand our inherent dignity and worth as image-bearers; we live in positive, giving relationships with others; and we actively steward God’s creation, both caring for it and being able to work and support ourselves as a result of that work. (19)

This account describes an existence far from that of the millions worldwide who suffer from the effects of poverty every day. At the same time, it is very likely that the non-poor who engage in STM may also be experiencing the poverty of broken relationships in some way. No one, regardless of race, gender, or economic status, can fully live in right relationship in all areas

because of sin. Being mindful that we are all sinners saved by the grace of God removes some of the division that is inherent between STM participants and the local beneficiaries of their work.

With this in mind, volunteers who participate in a cross-cultural experience such as STM trips should undergo serious reflection and worldview renewal. Above all, bearing in mind that poverty is only the condition of a group of people who are abstractly described as “the poor,” this is not a definitive description of their identity. As people made in God’s image, this label neither defines them nor creates the foundation for their existence. Using “the poor” as a general label can be dangerous because it enlarges a separation between the individuals who are struggling and the ones who intend to help them. The label of poverty also represents an intangible concept that can make it more difficult to be empathetic towards the real suffering of the people who are trapped in it. Participants in STM should take special care to actively recognize and respond to the actual human beings who live in poverty, who are equally as loved and valued by their Creator as they are. The image of God is reflected in both the poor and non-poor alike. This outlook should cause missionaries, regardless of their time commitment, to serve in a different manner than many foreigners have in the past.

Unfortunately, citizens of developed countries often lack the critical vision necessary to understand the deeper issues of economic inequality when they travel to the developing world. They have come to accept a system of beliefs and practices that end up harming their global neighbor without recognizing it. This type of hegemonic vision traps the poor in their poverty and the non-poor in the systems that create it. It is because of this narrow worldview that former Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide remarked that foreign visitors in developing countries like his own unintentionally provide “aid [that] does not aid” (Schut 132). Aid that does not aid transpires when STM teams, out of great compassion in their hearts, provide goods and services



that are available locally, having almost no regard for the impact of their work on businesses in the local community. By merely going along with the pattern of events that STM teams have followed for decades, they neglect to consider the long-term impact of their actions on the lives and dignity of the people they intend to serve. Whenever outsiders do for the poor what they are capable of doing for themselves, they end up perpetuating dependency instead of displaying true neighbor-love.

Change, however, is possible and “begins with recognizing what is going on – critical vision” (Moe-Lobeda 222). Adopting a critical vision is key for successful STM that truly contributes to long-term development for local beneficiaries. Moe-Lobeda challenges all Christians to “*know and see differently*, so that we might *live differently*” (18). Even the best-intentioned STM team must evaluate how their plans and activities continue to contribute to the unjust structures that further the physical and psychological poverty from which so many people in the developing world suffer. New strategies and service opportunities should be devised that enhance the participation of the poor in development rather than inadvertently discourage it. Foreign short-term teams working with critical vision will include national hosts in the planning and decision-making process, as well as work alongside local beneficiaries in their service. They will carefully consider how their planned activities alleviate or perpetuate the poverty of their global neighbors, looking past their physical needs and seeking ways to connect on a deeper level.

In this context of service and change, foreigners should anticipate having their own worldview challenged, if not changed completely, regarding poverty. Remembering that poverty is above all a human issue, one that seriously affects individual persons and their families, can significantly change the response to their situation. When work is done among the poor in an

intentionally inclusive way, STM service can contribute to the process of overcoming their marred identity. Instead of doing jobs *for* them that the poor can complete themselves or giving away items *to* those who can provide for themselves, development-minded STM teams serve in collaboration *with* the local community members, planting seeds for further participation and future empowerment. When that occurs, we can optimistically hope that when citizens of both the developed and developing world “change their behavior and it works for them, their hearts and minds will follow” (Myers 266). When STM participants solely focus on providing for the physical needs of the poor, they fail to address the complex nature of poverty and the multifaceted issues that the poor face.

#### VI. Cultural Factors Relevant to STM and Development

Just as there is no one cause of poverty, there is no single way to lessen its effects on people in the developing world. STM teams that want to make a long-term impact during their short time abroad will strive to understand and respect local customs, planning and serving with cultural intelligence. As one activist from Mozambique shrewdly observed, “realities are different in different countries. Something that you can apply in your country doesn’t apply to us, so we have to find our own way, but with support and information” (Pellow 235). Short-term missions that contributes to long-term transformation works towards creating situations where the poor implement their own plans and participate in community development in ways that work best in their cultural context.

The international nature of short-term missions presents unique challenges in regards to cross-cultural interactions that can either expand or impede opportunities for long-term development work. Both internal stress and external conflict occur as a result of cultures clashing on a STM trip for the foreign participants and local beneficiaries. Since it is the Westerners who

took the initiative to visit another culture, they should defer to the host culture's values and norms as guests during their brief period there. Considering one's own ethnocentrism, along with cultural factors such as power distance, context, and collectivism, creates a STM experience that supports long-term development work and sets the stage for transformative participation in host nations.

In order to serve with cultural intelligence, STM participants should first consider their own ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is defined by African professor and former missionary Robert Aboagye-Mensah as “an intellectual, emotional, and cultural attitude of a particular group of people who regard the identities and values of other groups of people as false, inferior, or immoral as compared to their own” (130). Ethnocentrism results when, unbeknownst to the person, their “own little world [is] the center of the universe” (Hofstede 387). This worldview issue is common among foreign teams on the mission field; indeed, it is our natural human condition. All people who feel strongly about their cultural identity and values are ethnocentric, the poor not exempted. Identifying one's own ethnocentrism involves evaluating aspects of the host culture based on preconceptions of your own customs. Then, we try to translate cultural differences using our own perception of what is good or right, but the new culture usually falls short in our ethnocentric judgment. Consequently, because of ethnocentrism, it is challenging to achieve a genuine unity between foreigners and locals because both groups “are uncomfortable with anything that blurs accepted boundaries, disturbs our identities, and disarranges our symbolic cultural maps” (Volf 78). STM participants should try to “discover the problematic parts of [their] own attitudes and choices” so that they can avoid creating division or offending people in the host nation (Thompson 99).

In my work at the U.S. – Mexico border, there are clashes between cultures because of differing attitudes and behaviors among citizens of each country. Many Mexicans in the impoverished border region have become so accustomed to receiving donations from American teams that handouts are often expected and people can even get offended if they are requested to contribute something in exchange for donations. Unfortunately, once the poor feel they deserve the money, clothes, food, and other gifts Westerners bring, they may never be motivated to put forth the effort needed on their behalf to see sustainable development in their community. Also, because of overly generalized and stereotypical stories in the media, Americans often accept this information as truth regarding Mexicans.

Additionally, as discussed earlier in this paper, expressing pity instead of compassion for those who live in poverty can result in looking down on those who are less fortunate than they are. This stereotypical mindset is perpetuated by the simplistic view of poverty and the innate disconnect between the poor and the non-poor. Thus, Westerners can see those who live in the Third World as so different that they “implicitly [portray] ‘them’ as the kind of people ‘we’ are not” (Volf 58). Ethnocentrism automatically places members of another culture or ethnicity as part of an out-group and, “we, due to essentialist reasoning, tend to see those on the ‘inside’ as more human than those on the outside” (Beck 91). This implies that not only do we exclude others from our group, but those who we consider to be in the out-group are inferior, sub-human and should be treated accordingly. This creation of otherness because of ethnocentric beliefs blocks real relationships from being built and keeps missionaries from fully engaging with the poor or inviting them to participate in their own development.

However, separation between nationalities, cultures, and different economic statuses do not exist in the Kingdom of God. The Bible tells us in the creation narrative that we are all

created equally: “God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Holy Bible*, Genesis 1:27). Since we are all image-bearers of God, we each have the same value and worth in his eyes. When we intentionally recognize the expression of God’s character in every person and culture, we are more able to embrace another way of life and honor the image of God in them.

One of the most important aspects of serving with cultural intelligence is being open to learn about and adapt to the people who have graciously received the STM into their nation and their homes. People traveling to other countries, therefore, must make the active decision to not only observe foreign cultural factors, but to adopt them as well. Simply recognizing that a cultural element like food or dress is different than one’s own is not enough; STM participants need to be driven to understand cross-cultural differences on a deeper level and adapt their behavior to fit the context where they are working. This mindfulness regarding new customs and conditions requires self-control against judgement of the host culture and an abandonment of ethnocentric beliefs.

Becoming mindful of how ethnocentrism impacts our actions in short-term missions is only one step to serving with cultural intelligence abroad. Another step is to identify key cultural components in the receiving nation that not only impact the STM experience, but carry implications for long-term development work as well. There are three major cultural factors that are critical to understand so that a STM trip can contribute to ongoing transformative work in host communities: power distance, context and individualism versus collectivism.

### Power Distance

Power distance is described in Geert Hofstede's book *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* as, "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 61). While differences in skills, power, wealth, and status are inevitable in every country, power distance specifically addresses how people handle these inequalities. In countries with a large power distance, less powerful people are more likely to accept this societal order and submit to those to whom they feel inferior. This is exemplified in any superior-subordinate relationship, including parent-child, teacher-student and boss-employee. In these cases, the inferior member can exhibit considerable dependence on the more powerful person in the relationship. In countries that score high in power distance, in addition to offering a great deal of formal respect to leaders, "titles are revered, leaders and followers are unlikely to socialize together, and subordinates are not expected to question their superiors" (Livermore 133).

According to Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI), most large power distance countries, where less powerful people tend to become dependent on the powerful, are in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America while the U.S., Canada, and most of Western Europe rank as having a small PDI (Hofstede 57-59). This data is indispensable from the viewpoint of an American traveling to Mexico to serve on a STM trip because it explains a key cultural dynamic that commonly comes into play between foreign missionaries and local community members. Beneficiaries of STM teams usually perceive trip participants as more skilled, more educated, and wealthier than them. Also, skin color and language skills make local residents view foreigners as more powerful than they are. Therefore, in addition to the disjunction felt because of distinct cultural differences, locals may not feel comfortable interacting with STM participants

because of this power distance issue. Already feeling inferior in the relationship, foreigners who insist on doing mission work *for* the poor perpetuate this separation and increase dependency. Although it may not be immediately obvious, further reflection on power distance as related to STM strategies shows how teams can underestimate the contribution of local people, consequently reinforcing dependency and their poverty of being.

Another implication of power distance in STM work is that local community members deem it necessary to respect the foreign volunteers in such a way that does not question the motives or methods of their work. Even if locals perceive something to be incorrect or offensive, it is rare that they actually speak up against this offense directly to the visiting team. Too often, STM participants commit cultural indiscretions without consideration as to its impact on the local community or long-term work there. In Mexico, this may include wearing clothes considered immodest at a conservative Christian church or rejecting a home-cooked meal from a very hospitable local woman. In these cases, the foreign visitor displays their ethnocentrism by putting their taste, opinion, or comfort above that of the national hosts.

Some local hosts with a high PDI disposition prefer to overlook or excuse cultural taboos committed rather than risk offending STM participants by calling them out, as they can feel like they have overstepped their bounds in doing so. Barber writes that local hosts for American STM teams to Japan were generally very forgiving of culturally-inappropriate behavior, “able to tolerate most borderline behavior of STM guests, but they were still painfully aware of what that behavior looks like to most other Japanese” (Barber 315). In my own experience with STM teams, I have heard Mexican missionaries apologize on various occasions to local community members because of the possibly offensive behavior of a STM team. Without a long-term

perspective of their time abroad, those who are unwise regarding cultural norms may hinder the work of local missionaries after their trip is over.

People taking STM trips abroad, especially in high PDI countries, should take into account the following six suggestions for overcoming ethnocentrism and dealing with the power distance dynamic:

1. *Invest time into studying cultural aspects of the receiving nation before leaving on a STM trip.* While you may never fully figure out every cultural aspect of your destination, your effort to gain understanding will make a great difference during your time abroad.
2. *Observe, not only members of the host culture, but your own as well.* Consider how locals are responding to the other people on your team. Notice especially their body language, as this is often more telling than actual words.
3. *Do not jump to conclusions but instead question everything you see.* Resist passing judgement and continually ask “why” regarding cultural issues that you do not understand, and even those you think you do.
4. *Initiate an open conversation with someone in the host nation and create a list of cultural taboos for your STM team to avoid.* You need to seek out this person and insist, as they may be embarrassed or feel out of place sharing them with you.
5. *Be proactive regarding cultural indiscretions you observe among your team.* Do not wait for local community members to point out culturally-offensive behaviors because, by that point, you may have already harmed the long-term work of local missionaries there.



6. *Do not overemphasize your job title or educational level with people in the host nation.* This only further ostracizes the people you have gone to serve. Attempt to be known in local terms as a friend or brother, rather than a leader or professional.

Humility is another key aspect to overcoming ethnocentrism and power distance issues in short-term missions. As it is so important and far reaching in STM and long-term development, it deserves an expanded discussion here.

Abandoning an attitude of cultural superiority allows us to look beyond differences and affirm the rich beauty found in other cultures. In humility, we are able to recognize the intrinsic value of every human being and the contribution they are able to make to the world. Humility also makes us aware of how much we do not know and how much more there is to learn about other people and their culture. This is especially important in STM work because the local community members are the ones who can best enact change in a culturally-relevant way. Even though STM participants may have training that makes them feel qualified to *do* missions work abroad, humility requires foreigners to make “the noble choice to forgo your status, deploy your resources, or use your influence for the good of others before yourself” (Dickson 11:45-12:01). In this way, STM team members still participate, but in a way that empowers locals by setting the stage for them to work towards their own development.

Humility places the local beneficiary at the center of the mission story, not the foreign participant. Unfortunately, in an effort to fix the poor’s material poverty, foreign volunteers “become the actors, and the poor are relegated to the audience in the development theatre” (Nabie 116). Instead of the poor watching as visitors build them a bathroom or paint their child’s school, short-term missions should aim to connect local people with opportunities to love their neighbor and serve in their community. In the Homes of Hope program, the Mexican family

receiving the house is always encouraged to participate in the build process, but sometimes end up sheepishly watching the Westerners do the majority of the work themselves. However, if Homes of Hope beneficiaries were treated as equal members of the build team by being engaged in a critical way during every step of the build process, they would feel like indispensable members of the team and participate more. This boost of confidence then could lead them to greater contributions in their community as well. Both the “Family Introduction Letter” and the “Family Follow Up Letter” in the appendix section of this thesis communicates to local beneficiaries the significance of their current and future participation in development work. Humility creates a space for local residents to participate in mission work, recognizing that they know best what is needed in their community and how to accomplish it in their context.

### Context

Because they are highly contextual, both STM trips and long-term development work are accomplished in different communities in various ways. Currently, much of STM work is “focused on filling the gaps between what is considered ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’” (Nabie 116). STM trips that practice this approach are perceived as successful when participants do work that fills in the economic gaps between the sending and receiving countries. However, the goal of mission work should never be to make one country more like another. Instead of trying to make the developing world more “Western”, our work should reflect a fundamental respect of the local culture. God expresses himself in unique ways in different cultures, so we should search for God-honoring customs that can create bridges towards the best version of community that God intended for those people. When STM teams work with humility, they are able to distinguish between imposing their own cultural norms on the people through their work

and recognizing aspects of daily life in the host nations that inspire greatness and future development.

Since short-term missions is highly contextual, we must proceed with caution, even as we become aware of cultural differences and our own biases. STM teams should remember that what works in one place and time may not work in another, even if it is in the same city or country. In fact, all STM strategies and projects should ideally be initiated by hosts in the receiving country, who extend an invitation to STM teams to come and assist them in ongoing work there. At the minimum, however, all STM plans should be reviewed by hosts to ensure they are genuinely needed and culturally appropriate. For this reason, the recommendations given in the appendix of this thesis are specific to the YWAM San Diego/Baja Homes of Hope program in Tijuana, Mexico.

At the same time, the reasoning and principles addressed here may apply to other contexts, but in different ways to other activities or programs. For example, the Homes of Hope (HOH) construction process changed significantly as the program expanded internationally. The house built for a beneficiary in the dry desert climate of northern Mexico includes a wood structure, cement floor, drywall interior, and a shingled roof. However, in the wet and humid climate of Costa Rica, Homes of Hope chose the more appropriate metal corrugated roofing that is more sustainable in their wet climate. Then, to better serve families living in the jungle, their program uses foam blocks filled with cement on their build site because, “in addition to being cheaper to construct, foam houses are more weather resistant” (“Costa Rica”).

Another example of a STM project by this ministry that adapted to the context in a culturally relevant way, and thus contributes to long-term development, can be found in Asia. In the region outside the capital of Phnom Penh, many poor Cambodian farmers live among their

rice fields and are vulnerable to flooding. A HOH house there was designed by local Cambodian YWAM staff for their context, who were well aware of “what liabilities and vulnerabilities [they] have, and what threats and risks [they] face” (Rodin 13). Because of the particular challenges in this context, HOH teams spend their first day on the build site erecting eight-foot cement posts upon which the house is constructed. This resilient design, inspired by surrounding homes, is a unique model for HOH Cambodia and required significant modification of the standard program to make it appropriate for the local context.

Yet another distinct HOH prototype was constructed in Nepal after the 2015 earthquake. This design used metal beams, which are stronger, lighter and more earthquake safe than the typical rock and mud structures there. The Mexican men that led this construction spent two weeks investing significant time to teach a Nepalese missionary welding and other skills necessary to continue building this type of structure after they left. Because the STM team’s apprentice was treated as a friend and equal team member who was engaged in a critical way during every step of the build process, his new skill set and confidence led him to complete many significant long-term development projects. After the team’s departure, he worked to rebuild several structures ruined by the earthquake, including village homestays that promote ethical tourism opportunities for visiting short-terms teams. Additionally, this hard-working Nepalese man mobilized local residents in isolated mountainous villages to build a church, a school, and an orphanage.

These examples show what kind of sustainable development is possible when STM participants stop doing all of the work for the poor and engage with them during their trip, creating an environment of service where the spirit of dependency is broken and self-sufficiency is enhanced. Also, collaborative development work enhances the dignity of the poor and

encourages further involvement in the community after the team's departure. When STM work is contextualized, it is driven by local dreams and ideas, drawing the poor closer to God's intentions for development in their community. An effective STM team that considers context adapts its activities and strategies to the diverse locations and cultures where they serve.

### Individualism versus Collectivism

The third specific cultural factor that is extremely relevant for short-term missions and its long-term impact is the individualism versus collectivism dichotomy. In individualist cultures, social ties are generally loose, independence and efficiency are praised, and "speaking one's mind is a virtue" (Hofstede 107). In collectivist cultures, a person's membership to a group is more important than individual status and relationships are given the highest priority. After extensive research into this topic, Hofstede concludes that "individualistic countries tend to be rich, while collectivist countries tend to be poor" (93). This implies then that the majority of STM teams travel from individualistic, task-based cultures to poorer, relationship-based ones.

Mexico exemplifies a collectivist nation and many of their cultural values apply to other Latin American nations as well. Since Mexicans are extremely family-oriented, it is common for extended family members to live together and grown children are not necessarily expected to move away from their parents like in individualist cultures. Also, the common Spanish phrase *mi casa es su casa* ("my home is your home") portrays how a Mexican family's door is always open to friends or strangers. In fact, "it is seen as normal and right that one's in-group can at any time invade one's private life" (Hofstede 126). Another tradition in Mexican culture is "the institution of *compadres* and *comadres* who are treated as relatives even if they are not" (Hofstede 111). This social bond beyond blood relations and economic status is sustained

through mutual respect for one another. Bearing in mind these relational aspects of culture can contribute to a more developmentally-focused STM trip.

While ethnocentrism may lead us to believe that being independent and task-oriented is the norm, research shows that “collectivist is the rule in our world, and individualism is the exception” (Hofstede 94). The majority of Westerners travel to collectivist countries on mission trips and the local host’s priority of relationship should be respected and integrated as a part of the trip. Instead, the visiting team usually wants to get as much done as possible and often fails to devote time to get to know their hosts or the beneficiaries of their work. Many Westerners even consider an investment in personal relationships as an unwise and unproductive use of their limited time. Culturally-speaking however, residents of collectivist nations desire much more of their visitors’ time and social exchange than their money or physical labor.

In the aforementioned study of house construction recipients in Honduras, the surveys showed that Hondurans mainly supported STM groups coming because of the opportunity to build relationships with them, but they felt that visitors did not spend enough time on this aspect of the trip. Ver Beek reports:

Interviews revealed that Honduran communities felt most North American work groups had missed opportunities to build stronger relationships. Although the majority of communities felt that the groups carried a positive message, many said they would have liked to have more contact with them . . . an attitude of openness, not language, was the most important factor in communication. (481)

This study showed also that local Hondurans and the receiving missions agencies both considered that the STM teams lost the chance to have a greater impact on the lives of the new homeowners because of their lack of investment into relationship building.

In a collectivist culture, being available to have a conversation, regardless of language barriers, is of utmost importance. In a place where relationship takes precedence over tasks, "the fact of being together is emotionally sufficient" (Hofstede 108). During my fieldwork in Tijuana, I interviewed an American HOH participant, Julie Davis, who returned to visit a Mexican family who had recently received a home. She spent the whole afternoon sitting with the mother in her new house and listening to her through a translator. The once joyful new homeowner spoke about the isolation and depression she felt upon moving from her old neighborhood into her new house somewhere else. Davis recounted the mother's distress, something she had not shared with anyone during the house construction process:

She was in so much pain and she's dealing with so much stuff. We were asking her, "what's on your heart?" It felt like it took her a long time for her to really share that . . . I felt like she finally felt safe and she just let it out because it came with lots of sobbing . . . [The mother said] "this is really good for my family but this is so hard for me."

This type of interaction is rarely possible during an actual HOH build because everyone is focused on completing their tasks to get the house completed in the time allotted. However, deeper, more meaningful connections can be made when emphasis is put on relationships over projects. When a more holistic view of poverty is taken into consideration, the *work* of the ministry on a STM trip includes being present with the local people in their joy and their pain.

A more relational approach to STM trips in collectivist nations can contribute greatly to long-term development in a community, but these relationships must be built in a healthy way that promotes dignity and equality between the poor and non-poor. Lupton points out this shocking dynamic regarding short-lived relationships built solely around one person or group eliminating another's physical need:

Relationships built on need do not reduce need. Rather, they require more and more need to continue . . . The victim brings the dilemma; the rescuer finds the solution. When one problem is solved, another must be presented in order for the relationship to continue. If the victim no longer needs a solution, the rescuer is no longer needed. And the relationship ends or must dramatically change. (Lupton 61)

There must be a change in the way relationships between STM participants and local beneficiaries are formed, as the donor-recipient basis upon which most STM experiences are built does not allow for ongoing development work to occur, but instead promotes further dependency among the poor. When mutually respectful ties are made that honor each person involved, STM trips help establish the groundwork for future participatory development work to occur.

Even though ethnocentrism may drive us to highlight differences between people of other cultures, STM participants can intentionally stress their sameness and build relationships with those in the host nation. By remembering that all people are created in the image of God with a purpose to love and be loved, "we begin to see what we have in common with each other as humans rather than being obsessed with the differences, we begin to strip away the 'us versus them' mentality" (Livermore 69). To that end, the documents in the appendix of this thesis aim to promote relationship and enhance the voice of the poor in the Homes of Hope ministry. The



“Build Team Questions for Beneficiary Family” in the appendix is written intentionally to help STM participants gain cultural understanding and build relationship with home recipients during the build. The “Family Follow Up Survey” that follows evaluates in part how well the HOH build promoted relational connections with the beneficiaries as well as their participation during the construction.

Consideration of the various cultural factors discussed in this section can greatly enhance the long-term impact of any STM trip. While power distance plays a significant role in cross-cultural relationships, acknowledging this dynamic can help STM participants address it by serving with humility. Considering context enables foreigners to find common ground with their global neighbor through culturally-relevant work and sets STM participants in a situation where they are able to establish genuine connections with the people they have traveled to serve. STM work that avoids an individualistic approach but rather adapts to the collectivist nature of host societies will promote relationships based on equality and respect between the foreign participants and the local community members. When these key cultural factors are considered, the physical demonstration of a completed project is no longer the ultimate goal of a short-term trip. Buildings erected on a mission trip can fall, burn down, or cease to be used, but a local person who is empowered through meaningful relationships and dignity-enhancing participation can provoke sustainable change in their community and nation long after the STM team has left.

## VII. Importance of Local Capital and Participation

The challenging work of overcoming poverty and changing one’s destiny should not be done alone, but can be accomplished through dependence on God and in partnership with other members of one’s community. Encouraging friends, caring family, and sympathetic neighbors build a sense of community and encourage the participation necessary to generate and maintain

sustainable transformation. STM participants can also come alongside local community members to create that supportive circle they need to progress in their own development. STM teams whose strategies are appreciative and inclusive of local people and their capital will see long-term results from their trips, since “empowerment through participation is the single most critical element of transformation” (Myers 217).

When a STM trip’s main focus is fixing perceived problems in a community, they are quick to not only find them, but amplify what is wrong about the people or place they are visiting. With this view of poverty and strategy in STM work, foreigners hastily bring in outside resources to address a particular situation and meet a need they have identified. However, applying an appreciative approach to STM trips aims at “initiating interventions by highlighting the positive,” hearing from the local people and dreaming together about a better future (Merriam and Tisdell 55). The appreciative inquiry (AI) approach applied to mission work stops looking at negative issues and instead concentrates on positive aspects, current competencies, past successes, and tangible beauty that exist in every community. The AI process builds on strengths and revolves around positive discourse, believing that “deficit language can lead to deficit thinking,” furthering the poverty of being among the poor (Hammond 19). Instead, the appreciative inquiry process starts by “appreciating and valuing the best of ‘what is’” in a community and assists local residents in envisioning, dialoguing, and innovating what could be accomplished there (Hammond 18).

Conversations with an AI focus should be given priority before and during STM trips and, in the collectivist societies where most of these trips take place, can be easily woven into the participants’ schedule. For example, on a house building project, questions about a local resident’s difficult living conditions could be replaced with inquiries such as:

- Where does your strength come from to cope with and overcome adversity?
- What life-giving force has helped you when times were tough?
- What has happened in your life that you are proud of?
- What have you accomplished that has made you feel successful?
- What is something that you value that makes you feel good about yourself?
- Which of your skills or resources have helped you do things that you believed in?
- How have your relationships worked for you and have enabled you to do things you thought were not possible?

Recalling moments of past successes builds confidence and commitment for future participation. These questions point to the efforts of community members in seeking their own development and recognizing them enhances their significance. It also increases the faith of the poor as they recognize how God has been at work among them and has strengthened them through previous difficulties. When opportunities for involvement in a community project arise, the positive energy derived from reliving past accomplishments increases motivation for the future. These questions can also be generalized to discover how individuals have already made a collective effort to create positive change in their community.

Through genuine discussion based on valuing what God has already placed within a community, the strengths and capital of that place can also be identified. An individual's or community's assets reach far beyond what a STM visitor can see during their short visit. While financial capital or income among the poor may be limited, they have many other areas from which to draw resources from, although they are not all immediately identifiable. For example, natural capital such as "land, forests, marine/wild resources, water, air quality, erosion protection," and biodiversity are an important area from which livelihoods are derived (DFID).

In fact, survival in some places is based on the help of key environmental services and food produced from natural capital. The physical strength and well-being of residents that results from the advantageous use of natural capital are other assets available in communities.

Good health, the ability to work, various proficiencies, and in-depth knowledge are examples of human capital available among the poor. When valued by outsiders, these areas that make people productive can be used to stimulate community participation. Myers also includes the level of spiritual capital, including faith in a higher power, prayer, and churches that “aspire to form character and infuse values into the life of the community” as available assets (252). This vital human and spiritual capital in a community is beyond the measure of any amount of humanitarian aid that could be brought from the outside. However, the strengths and capacities of residents often go untapped because of the main focus of STM teams to put their own skills to good use. The training and instruction offered by foreign professionals to locals during STM trips aspire to build these types of capital but can at times undermine the wealth of local knowledge and capacities already present there, waiting to be accessed and appreciated.

Finally, the social capital within a collectivist society is very substantial and valuable for producing long-term change in a community. Networks, associations, membership of a group, and relationships based on trust and reciprocity are products of social capital and encourage participation in development work. As locals become more involved in their communities, this in turn reaffirms and strengthens relationships, making this type of capital self-reinforcing. The relationships of trust and kinship found in a highly collectivist society can also “compensate for a lack of other types of capital,” as people are willing to share with each other what little they have as well as provide emotional support through difficult times (DFID). In addition, as community members join together around a common goal to see their lives improved, the chance to use their

skills increases their capacity for the future. As they see success in their own endeavors, the poor may begin to perceive the needs of those around them and be motivated to help others as well.

With an appreciative outlook of local people and capital, short-term mission trips can play a vital role in engaging the poor in their own development. In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins describes the importance of leaders getting their staff in the correct roles in their company so that they can be more effective at creating positive change. The analogy used to describe this concept is having the right people in the right seats on the bus, and it applies to the discussion of local participation in STM work as well. Regrettably, the poor are mostly excluded from their own development, living as passive spectators of the development work happening around them. When development happens *to* the poor instead of *with* the poor, their seat on the bus is essentially non-existent and participation is not an option. When there is no platform for them to express their own hopes for their community and ideas about how to accomplish them, the poor are essentially not invited take a seat at all. Participatory development means having the right people (the poor) in the right seats (full participation according to their strengths and assets) on the bus and *then* figuring out where to drive it (Collins 13).

One example of this is during the conclusion of a Homes of Hope build, the beneficiary family expresses the desire to participate in another house build in the future. The overflow of gratitude for what they have received combined with the desire to share their blessings with another family in need motivates them to seek opportunities to join in another build. Offering a chance for previous beneficiaries to make a hands-on contribution to a neighbor's house build promotes local unity and offers locals a chance to be a part of advancing God's kingdom in their own community. It also deepens the feeling of joy they felt during their own house build as they

sacrificially give their time and energy to participate. This participation offers a platform for their voice to be heard, as they testify to God's transforming power in their own lives to their neighbors.

Another goal in inviting previous beneficiaries to participate in future house builds is to foster local leadership as an integral part of the program. Enthusiastic and trustworthy community members could eventually be trained to replace YWAM staff and fill the traditional roles they hold as builders, translators and hosts on the build sites. People with experience in construction, knowledge of English, or a heart for hospitality could use their gifts to serve this ministry well. These skill sets are abundant and easy to locate among Mexicans, especially in the northern Baja region. Local residents serving in a leadership capacity with STM teams reverses the poverty mindset among the poor as they guide foreigners with strength and dedication. Alongside the foreigners' gift of a home and material possessions for a poor family, previous Homes of Hope beneficiaries offer the management and guidance on the build site that the team needs. In essence, this represents a reversal of the traditional donor-recipient relationship, making the poor the teachers and the non-poor the trainees.

Instead of seeing the poor as inactive recipients or unapproachable objects of STM work, foreign participants can honor them as people "with needs, hopes and worries as real and legitimate as their own" by allowing their dreams and concerns to take priority over outside ideas considered beneficial for them (Arbinger 148). Unfortunately, local residents are often left out of participating in STM work, even though they are likely the most motivated to see the success of a community project as the direct beneficiaries. Appreciating the local people and accessing their capital for STM work promotes the participation needed to generate long-term results from these trips abroad. Although outsiders normally have in mind what activities they want to do

during their trip and expect the local community to fit into their plan, short-term missions can be more effective when ministry decisions are based on consultation with local residents and consideration of how they can be involved. Since visitors do not have a complete understanding of the needs of a community like the actual residents do, foreign teams could be presented with several opportunities to serve that the local residents have identified. In this way, the poor are empowered by having their voice heard and are motivated to participate in a project that they instigated and care about in their community.

The common Western mentality of poverty as a deficit and the internalization of poverty among the poor can lead individuals to believe that they were made without value in their lives or any ability to contribute to society, hindering their drive to participate in development work. Myers astutely writes that “the result of poverty is that people who are poor no longer know who they are (being) nor do they believe that they have a vocation or gifts of any value (doing)” (128). However, a more thorough examination of a community can pinpoint an abundance of available capital among local people. When local assets are appreciated and utilized alongside foreign help, STM trips “help set up conditions within which individuals and groups can empower themselves” (Willis 113). Participation alongside foreigners gives local community members the opportunity to identify and contribute their resources and talents to create a lasting difference. With this appreciation, inclusion, and integration of the poor alongside STM participants, the change that takes place becomes sustainable and transformative.

## VIII. Conclusion

Short-term missions has a long history of releasing foreigners into underdeveloped countries to meet the physical needs of the poor, with any deeper long-term impact in the community as a secondary goal. Without relational connections or community participation,

STM trips can resemble voluntourism as foreigners are perceived to be the main focus and principal actors of the experience. A change in STM strategy is possible though when there is a mindset shift regarding poverty in both the foreigners and local beneficiaries. Both groups should recognize the deeper issues beyond physical poverty that need to be addressed, including that the poor are not the only ones who suffer from a poverty of being. When STM participants leave extremely moved by the experience, it may be that they have also overcome some type of internal suffering and had broken relationships restored during their trip. At the same time, foreigners need a renewed mind regarding how poverty impacts those in developing countries and how important the poor are to the perceived success of their time abroad.

Just as a customer is essential to the survival of a business, foreigners need the poor to receive them in their communities for their STM trip to happen. By avoiding ethnocentrism and working with humility, STM participants can take on the roles of learner, encourager, or counselor for local church members whose evangelism and discipleship is often more effective since they do not experience the same language and social barriers that strangers do. With that in mind, STM participants can begin to see the important role that the poor play in development work and relationships built on reciprocal exchange can be established. In fact, friendship with the poor is an often overlooked “medium for showing them they [are] valued and loved by a God who care-fully [*sic*] created them” (Lupton 40).

Despite a STM team’s limited time abroad, participants should pay considerable attention to issues regarding power distance, context and collectivism during their trip. These cultural factors make “establishing authentic parity between people of unequal power” a delicate job that must be done intentionally (Lupton 37). In *Homes of Hope*, an act as simple as giving the Mexican family a matching team shirt to wear as they work alongside the foreign build team



fosters an environment of unity for all participants. Also, instead of foreigners taking photos of Mexicans beside their dilapidated home, further exhibiting their poverty, snapshots should highlight locals' participation in STM efforts or other dignity-promoting acts. STM trips create a space for both the poor and non-poor to live out their life callings. Therefore, the main question to address is not who is doing all of the work or who leaves more impacted as a result of a STM trip; it is, how are *all* of the participants – both foreign visitors and local beneficiaries – using their God-given gifts to accomplish his purposes for the community and inspiring others to do the same.

As vice president of YWAM's Homes of Hope program and long-term missionary for almost two decades, Kody Spang has traveled around the globe to build houses and witnessed the physical and spiritual impact a STM trip can have on a family in need. After overseeing hundreds of STM teams on four different continents, Spang reveals that "I don't think any program or rally is ever going to be enough for the needs that some communities have. People have so many needs . . . and sometimes they just need a hug!" Indeed, a simple expression of neighbor love during STM trips is often ignored in favor of producing picture-perfect structures or gathering large crowds to serve as the audience for the foreigners' development performance. From Spang's expansive experience, he considers STM trips to generate long-term development when the host organization has established an ongoing presence in the communities that "most people have forgotten about and most people don't want to go to" (Spang). In places where the poor feel rejected and useless, personal investment of time and social exchange– like that of Andrea with the Guzman Ochoa family – that go beyond providing for physical needs equip people to overcome their poverty mentality, thinking about their future and behaving in a different way.

While the work done on STM trips may be primarily accomplished by the outside visitors, accessing local capital and empowering local residents is key to unlocking continual, long-term transformation in a community. Local participation takes the poor out of the place of quiet observers to the flurry of action happening around them and places them at center stage as the principal actors in their own development. Projects that are born out of the dreams and concerns of local residents and accomplished through their own strengths and resources will create momentum for the future, increase motivation and cause sustainable transformation. When the poor take ownership of the entire development process – including the planning, implementation and evaluation of STM trips- they are also empowered to see the long-term work through to completion after foreigners have left.

Erick and Josefina believe that Homes of Hope is a perfect name for the house-building ministry that drastically changed their lives. Although their own future once seemed dismal, their new home gave them “a new set of options and a fresh ability to think positively about the future ... Hope is a powerful weapon to fight poverty with” (Lambert 58). In addition to their physical needs being met, ongoing relationship with a long-term missionary who introduced to them the eternal hope of salvation from a God who deeply loves and cares about them completely changed their worldview and future aspirations. When asked if she thought that a STM trip could bring transformation to other families as well, Josefina knowingly replied, “yes, we can do it, we can change, but we need to be together. Show them, talk to them, and walk through it together.” Certainly, when we journey with the poor in culturally-appropriate and dignity-enhancing ways through both their suffering and their successes, even a short time together can produce lasting transformation.

## Appendix: Homes of Hope Project

Every year, thousands of foreigners descend onto the campus of Youth With A Mission (YWAM) San Diego/Baja to participate in their Homes of Hope house building ministry in Tijuana, Mexico. This transformational, two-day house construction is led by YWAM missionaries together with foreign short-term participants to benefit a low-income Mexican family. This section includes a detailed description of the Homes of Hope ministry in Tijuana, Mexico, outlining the process through which a Mexican family goes when receiving a home from this organization as well as an in-depth look at what the experience entails for STM volunteers. This descriptive account of Homes of Hope (HOH) establishes the context and background necessary to understand the value and application of the rest of the appendix portion of this thesis. A discussion follows of possible strategies and documents that could be utilized in the HOH program with the goal of producing a deeper, sustainable change in the families' lives as a result of this STM experience.

The Homes of Hope story begins for a low-income Mexican family at an orientation meeting in a local church or community center. Interested families may see the organization's banner outside of the meeting location indicating the date and time of the orientation, but more often, a friend or neighbor passes them the phone number of a Homes of Hope staff, who directs them to this meeting. The family selection process initiates here as the Homes of Hope staff present to potential house recipients the background and purpose of the ministry, together with the requirements they must present to qualify for a home at a subsequent interview.

To be eligible for an interview with Homes of Hope, a family must meet these basic conditions: have children under the age of eighteen, own a property that is legally in their name, never have benefitted previously from a house construction from this or any other organization,

earn less than US\$100 a week (around 1800 Mexican pesos depending on the current exchange rate). This estimation of earning means some qualifying families actually fall above the national poverty line in Mexico, which is 1487 pesos for a two-parent household (CONEVAL). Also, land ownership excludes the extremely poor in the country because property ownership is far outside their means to fulfill this requirement.

Two weeks later, the families deemed eligible by YWAM staff for an interview return to the same location in the community with all of the necessary paperwork that proves their impoverished situation. Every family is interviewed individually by a Homes of Hope staff member, who asks them predetermined questions about their current living situation. They also collect copies of several documents to verify the family's narrative. The interview form is combined with copies of their documents to create what is known as the "family profile." Each family interview can last up to one hour. Upon completion, the family is told that they will be contacted within three months to set up a visit to investigate their current living situation. These site visits, done by experienced HOH staff, validate the information given by the family at the interview and confirms or denies the family's real need for a new house. Misrepresenting themselves to YWAM staff, living in a home that is larger or nicer than a HOH house, or falling behind on their land payments are the most common reasons why a family who fulfills the previously mentioned requirements would not qualify to receive a house from this organization.

After the site visit, HOH staff pray about the family's living conditions and seek God for guidance as to whether or not they should receive a new house. Families can wait for a decision for up to six months after completing their application, but urgent needs receive priority and a faster response. Once the decision is made, the family receives a phone call notifying them of the result of their application. Afterwards, a YWAM staff member contacts local vendors who

pour the cement slab, deliver the building materials and set up a portable outhouse at the worksite prior to the STM team's arrival.

Basic information taken from the Mexican family's profile is uploaded to the YWAM San Diego/Baja website under the title of the team's name that will build their home ("Family Selection"). That way, STM team members to learn about the family they will help prior to their arrival. Although the Mexican family receives no relevant information about the visiting STM team, the section of this appendix titled "Build Team Profile" is an attempt to make information sharing prior to the build mutual. Currently, they are simply advised about the dates when the construction will take place and that they are required to have their entire family present during the build. On some occasions, this means loss of work or school, but generally bosses and teachers are sympathetic to give time off. The "Family Introduction Letter" in this appendix invites the Mexican beneficiaries to view themselves as equal contributors to the construction and necessary members of the build team, as well as warns them about cultural differences that may arise.

Meanwhile, a YWAM staff member, referred to as the "team contact," is in communication with the STM team leader bringing the group of foreigners to Mexico for the house build. Individual team members pay their travel from their home country, as well as their food, housing, and transportation in Mexico. As a team, they are also responsible to cover the full cost of the house construction and a basic furniture kit, presently assessed at US\$8,350 ("Pricing Plans"). The house build lasts for two full days (often Saturday and Sunday) and team members normally arrive in Mexico one day prior to the beginning of the construction and leave the day after they finish. The STM teams stay on the YWAM campus, located off of Highway 1 in southern Tijuana, where they also eat their meals before and after the house build. The only

interaction that the STM team members have with the Mexican beneficiary family is during the actual house construction, approximately from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the two build days.

After a basic orientation at the YWAM campus on day one of the house build, the STM team travels to the construction site, which will become the location of the family's new home in less than forty-eight hours. The STM team is accompanied by four YWAM staff members who have distinct roles:

1. "A builder" - foreman of the construction project
2. "B builder" - assistant builder in charge of constructing the roof
3. "Host" - oversees the paint crew and provides for the needs of the STM team members
4. "Translator" - facilitates communication between the foreigners and the beneficiary family by interpreting one-on-one conversations and group discussions.

The non-poor foreigners are often shocked on day one of the build when they see the condition in which the Mexican family is living: a dilapidated shack made of old garage doors erected on top of a dirt floor underneath a leaky tarp roof, sometimes without windows or a locking door. This moment is the first time that they truly encounter the physical poverty of the poor family they are committed to help.

Before the construction begins, the STM team, the Mexican family, and the YWAM staff create a circle around the empty concrete slab upon which the house will stand. The "A builder" assisted by the translator leads a time of brief introductions, a discussion regarding safety, and a group prayer. From there, the STM team members volunteer for the various work groups, including building the wall and the roof, cutting the material, and painting. Shortly after, the

construction begins and the STM volunteers - men, women, and children - work tirelessly in various weather conditions to see this project completed.

While the Mexican family is not specifically assigned any work duties during the house build, they are encouraged by the YWAM staff to participate. They very often join in the construction process, working diligently alongside the STM team. Together, they paint, raise the outer walls, and assemble the roof of the sixteen-by-twenty-foot house until lunchtime. Their participation creates a space for further exchange of stories and life experiences between themselves and the foreign team. The “Build Team Questions for Beneficiary Family” in this appendix offer suggestions to stimulate conversation between these two groups.

The host serves a pre-made lunch from a large cooler to all of the participants, allowing the Mexican family to serve themselves first as a way to honor them. Everyone disperses around the build site to enjoy a short break before getting back to work. After lunch, the entire group continues with their tasks, busily trying to get as much done on the house before they regather to clean up, pray, and say goodbye before dark.

After a restful night’s sleep at the YWAM campus, day two of the house build begins with a bumpy bus ride back to the worksite, a quick greeting and prayer with the family upon arrival, and new work assignments for the team members. The “A builder” and his helpers hang drywall inside the home and trim all the edges while the “B builder” completes the roof. The host and other team members put a second coat of paint on the outside of the house, as well as paint the inner walls a crisp white. The whole group comes together again for lunch on the second day and, occasionally, the Mexican family prepares a special meal out of gratitude for the team according to their means.

At some point during the day, the translator invites the Mexican family on a surprise shopping trip to a local grocery store, paid for by a pool of money collected among the STM team earlier that day. A few of the foreign volunteers also attend the shopping trip while the rest of the STM team completes the construction of the house on the build site. Upon the departure of the family to the store, the YWAM staff and some of the STM team members start assembling the new furniture for the house: a bunk bed, a dining table and chairs, and a stove. To complete the housewarming kit, they also make the beds with new linens, set the table, and hang a clock and key ring holder. These special touches are also a surprise for the beneficiary family, who were only informed of the gift of the home in their application.

When the “A builder” determines the house is complete, he will lead the family and STM team in the house dedication ceremony, translated by a YWAM staff member. At this time, the keys to the new house are passed around the circle of STM team members as they each share a meaningful message for the beneficiary family, often including how the build impacted them and words of encouragement for the new home recipients. During this ceremony, the beneficiaries are also presented with a Bible and a plaque commemorating this special occasion, including a picture of themselves with the STM team taken earlier that day.

The keys to the new house are presented to the new owners and the Mexican family has a chance to express their heart to the STM team and YWAM staff who joined with them to see their dream of having their own home come true. It is always an emotional time, filled with tears of gratitude from many of the participants, both poor and nonpoor. When they finish sharing, the family enters their new home for the first time and they are instructed to close the door behind them upon entering. While the visitors wait outside, the family is permitted some solitary moments inside the house to take in the significance of the gift they have just received and how



their lives are about to dramatically change. After a few minutes, a STM team member will knock on the door, allowing the Mexican family to invite them in to share congratulatory hugs, extend further thankfulness, and finish the day with prayer. After taking many selfies and group photos, the STM team and YWAM staff leave the build site with no specific plan to return or stay in contact with the Mexican family, though they will carry these people who shared this special experience with them in their hearts and minds forever.

Back at the YWAM base, a staff member leads a debrief session for the STM team. The time focuses on how this experience has changed the participants and how their lives may be different upon returning home. At the end of this short yet impactful time, many participants are left with the same question: “What happens to the family after they leave?” The Homes of Hope team contact describes how she explains the family follow-up process to the STM participants in this way: “It’s always like a vague response because we can’t really promise, and things aren’t always as simple or clear as the team wants it to be . . . I think that most people probably assume that there is some sort of scheduled or clear follow-up process. I think they just want to know that the family is doing well” (Li).

With new technology and social media available to even low-income families, Li encourages foreign team members to engage with the Mexican families on their own. She commented that if the team made the effort on the build site to develop a relationship with the family, they are sometimes motivated enough to directly stay in contact with them without the facilitation of the YWAM staff. Team members who want to continue providing support for families after the house build, like sending birthday gifts or donating school uniforms, are assisted on a short-term basis, but YWAM currently does not facilitate any long-term sponsorship programs for HOH families.

Instead of perpetuating a donor-recipient relationship through child or family sponsorship, the ministry is moving towards a more locally-based model for family follow-up. The HOH Community Ministries team is working to establish a group of people from the local churches in the communities where they build houses who will continue discipling HOH recipients. The team manager shared that his strategy is based on the fact that, after years of failed attempts to get YWAM missionaries to commit to following up with families, church members “are the ones who are most committed to their communities because they are the locals” (Gallo García). Through collaboration with YWAM staff and participation on the build site alongside the STM team, local Christians can be equipped to continue important development work after the house construction finishes. The HOH Community Ministries team wants to involve local Christians in all of the stages of the build process, including the orientation, house construction, and family follow-up. Since development is a long-term process, it is necessary to involve members of the local community who are committed to ongoing change and growth there.

Family follow-up encourages Homes of Hope families in the process of overcoming elements of poverty beyond the house build. As previously discussed, poverty does not just impact one’s physical state, but often reflects emotional, social, and spiritual brokenness as well. As one HOH staff member wisely asserted, “the house supplies the physical need, but the spiritual side always needs discipleship” and follow-up provides “an opportunity to sow spiritually as well” (Curiel Carrillo). Another HOH staff member also explained that she has seen how the poor “need a house for their families, but still the house in their hearts is deteriorated” (Gallo). In collaboration with the local church, HOH beneficiaries can receive the encouragement they need to heal their broken relationship with God and receive new hope for

the future. Also, creating opportunities for previous HOH beneficiaries to participate in future house builds would strengthen the families' sense of belonging to their community, which is greatly lacking in the northern Mexico border region teeming with migrants. Through further participation, the new relationships and trust that are built together with the house increases the community's social capital and unity, paving the way for future development work.

For more than twenty-five years, low-income families around the world have seen their living situation go from destitute to dignified in one short weekend with help from the Homes of Hope program. This ministry creates a partnership between citizens of developed and developing nations where countless lives of the once faceless poor become like extended family to STM volunteers. As the founder of this program describes, this joint venture creates “a powerful *hand-up* effect, rather than a *handout* effect” among the poor (Lambert 58). Additional discipleship by the local church would provide the opportunity to journey with families and motivate them to overcome the poverty of being that is so deeply engrained in their lives. Relationship-based follow-up also stimulates emotional and spiritual growth that leads to the abundant life that God desires for every person and will “produce lasting fruit” from the HOH ministry (*Holy Bible*, John 15:16). The following documents in this appendix aim to intentionally integrate the development concepts presented in this thesis to the various stages of the Homes of Hope process.

### **Build Team Profile**

The purpose of this information is to establish a stronger relationship between the build team and the HOH beneficiary family prior to their arrival. YWAM already shares a family profile on their website that the build team is able to access to get to know more about the people for whom they will be building a home. Likewise, in the collectivist Mexican culture, families would surely like to know more about the people visiting them, but the model of a two-day build does not lend much time for relationship building. This document is meant to share with the Mexican family some basic information about the team who will participate on their home build.

The information in parentheses is purely for explanatory purposes and would be removed in the final form for the Mexican family. This document would be filled out by a YWAM staff member with information provided by the team leader. It would then be delivered to the beneficiary family at least one week before the build team's arrival. The final version will also be in Spanish, the local language of the people served.



## Build Team Profile

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### We are excited to meet you!

The team that is coming to serve alongside your family for this house build is:

\_\_\_\_\_ (official team name)

They are coming to Mexico from: \_\_\_\_\_ (city, state, country)

This group is made up of:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*(a short description of the people on the team – e.g. families with young children, professional athletes, business men and their wives, church youth group, neighbors and friends)*

Some people on the build team have visited Mexico before, but \_\_\_\_\_ (number) team members will be traveling here for the first time!

The team leader wanted to share this message with you: *(to be filled out by the team leader as a personal message to the family)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Optional -

If you are willing, the team has asked for prayer about the following topic before they arrive: *(to be filled out by any team member)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Attach a team photo here *(if feasible)*

### **Family Introduction Letter**

The purpose of this letter is to empower the beneficiary family to participate in their own development. It is written in simple language yet delivers a powerful message of inclusion between the poor beneficiaries and the non-poor team members. This document was drafted with the intention to help break the dependency mindset of the poor as foreigners do missions work for them without their inclusion in the development process. It also appreciates local capital that the family has to offer and addresses the issue of cultural differences in the construction process. The words are intentionally simple and speaks to the power distance dynamic in this culture, building up the local family while diminishing any perceived superiority of the visiting team. This letter is meant to be given to the beneficiary family prior to their house build and discussed with them by a YWAM staff member. The final version will be in Spanish, the local language.



## Family Introduction Letter

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Dear \_\_\_\_\_, *(first names of members of the HOH family)*

You are an important part of the build team! Although this group of foreigners has traveled a far distance to help you, we want you to know that your house cannot be built without your full participation. We believe you offer energy, enthusiasm and skills to make this weekend a success. We can't do this without you! Many of the team members who participate in our program have absolutely no construction experience – but don't worry! Our trained YWAM staff will guide you, together with the foreign team, through all the steps needed to construct a beautiful, safe, and sturdy structure for your family to live in.

The main reason that the foreign team members decided to come to Mexico is to get to know you – that's right, YOU! Some participants have never been to Mexico before and they are eager to learn about your country and culture. Your culture is full of unique aspects that our team members do not understand. Please help us to share with them more about this beautiful country that you call home.

Culture can be a tricky thing to understand. There are so many complex aspects - including language, family traditions, religion, music, education, use of finances, the norms of daily life. Many of these things are different from where the team comes from. Since they are not fully aware of all of the cultural aspects typical here, we would like to ask you for help with two things.

First, would you help us to explain the beautiful, rich, intense nature of the Mexican culture to these foreign visitors? They are very open to learn from you and believe that you have a lot to offer them in regards to wisdom and understanding.

Also, would you be willing to show grace and forgive any words or actions the team members make that offend you because of cultural differences? None of us can get it all right all the time. If you feel like one of the team members is not respecting you, your family, or your culture, please come and talk to a YWAM staff member. We are here to facilitate a great build experience for all participants.

We are so pleased to come alongside you as you see your dream of a new home for your family come true!

From, the YWAM staff

### **Build Team Questions for Beneficiary Family**

The purpose of this document is to create an opportunity for STM team members to interact and build a connection with the HOH beneficiary family. Because of cultural differences, it can be difficult to start a conversation or know how to interact between the groups. These questions are meant to stimulate discussion and help bring cultural awareness regarding the everyday life of Mexican families. They also create a foundation for further understanding and relationship, which can easily be built upon with subsequent questions created on the spot by inquisitive minds. Using the exact wording of the questions below is not essential; the topics mentioned are simply meant to spur ongoing conversation. Following up with answers using a phrase like “tell me more about that” can lead to a longer story that you should be prepared to engage with.

The questions are meant to be asked verbally in Spanish to the Mexican family, either through a translator or by a bilingual team member. The best way to receive a more open, honest answer is to present these questions in an informal setting by a single team member or a small group. Body language that expresses intent listening along with consistent eye contact on behalf of the STM participants will help create a more comfortable atmosphere and maintain connection with the family. Those asking these questions should always present themselves first and be willing to offer answers to the same questions regarding their own life throughout the conversation.





## Build Team Questions for Beneficiary Family

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- How long have you known your spouse? How did you meet? *(Omit in the case of a single-parent household)*
- Where does your extended family live? What is your relationship with them like? Do you see them often?
- What was the last holiday your family celebrated? What did you do?
- Where do you work? How do you get there? What do you enjoy about your work?
- What creative abilities do you have outside of the workplace? What are your favorite hobbies? What are new skills that you are interested in learning?
- Where do you go shopping? How do you get there? How often do you go?
- Did you face any challenges in obtaining your property? What were they? How did you overcome them?
- How did you decide to live in this community?
- What is your favorite thing about living in this community?
- What is your relationship like with your neighbors?
- Are you involved in any community groups? Which ones? What do you do there?
- Are there any churches in your community? Have you attended one? Which one?
- What role does religion play in your daily life? Do you see God at work in your family? If so, how?
- Where do your children go to school? What grade are they in? How are they doing with their classes? *(Can be directed at children)*
- Where do you envision yourself in five years? How do you see your family changing or growing in the next ten years?
- What hopes do you have for your children's future?
- What are you most proud of in your family?

### **Family Follow Up Letter**

The purpose of this letter is three-fold. First, it clearly states that the house is a gift from God, one of the key points that YWAM wants their HOH beneficiaries to understand. This explanation comes in an effort to diminish the donor-recipient dynamic in the relationship between the Mexican family, the YWAM missionaries, and STM team. It also affirms the family's efforts in the construction process. Recognition of their active participation in obtaining their new home breaks the spirit of dependency, enhances their dignity, and functions as a catalyst to ongoing service in their community. Finally, this document informs the family about the upcoming visit from a YWAM staff member to follow up on their situation.

This letter will be presented to the HOH family upon completion to their house build by a YWAM staff member. It can be discussed with the family during the aforementioned visit, which should take place within a month after the house build. In an attempt to respect their time, this information gives them a chance to consider the questions that they will be asked without catching them unprepared. Since ongoing relationship is of the utmost importance in the culture and key to the development process, the follow up visit would ideally be done by a YWAM staff member who also participated in the construction of the house. The final version will be in Spanish, the local language.



## Family Follow Up Letter

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Dear \_\_\_\_\_, *(first names of members of the HOH family)*

Congratulations on your new home! We are so pleased to have joined with you in your efforts to have a home for your family to live in for many years to come. Although your house was built by human hands, including your own, we believe that it was in God's plan for you to receive it. God has seen your need and has answered your prayers by sending the foreign team to come together with you to build this house. What you experienced with us is just a small taste of the abundant love and blessings that God has for you.

We believe God put the desire in the hearts of each foreign team member to participate in this house build and provided for all of their needs to bring them to Mexico. Despite many obstacles they had to overcome to get here, they believed that it was worth it to be able to demonstrate to your family in a very real way that God loves you and cares about your needs. God is the source of all of the provision necessary to build your house and the giver of every good gift inside of it. Although you may never again see the foreign team members that built alongside you, you can express the gratitude that you feel in your hearts to God, who is present with you at all times and hears you whenever you cry out to him.

Also, we want to recognize the grand effort that you put forth to see your dream of having a home for your family come true. Something that may have seemed impossible in the past for you to complete on your own has proven to be possible with God's provision and teamwork. Your participation was extremely necessary to see this goal accomplished and you should be very proud of the work that you did during the construction and preparing for it.

You have been given a special set of skills, knowledge, and abilities that can help you to continue to achieve your goals. Now that you have seen this project completed with the help of God and others, consider what other dreams you have for yourself, your family, and your community. God has uniquely gifted you to create positive change in the world around you. Are you willing to ask God what new steps he would have you take today that will help bring further transformation to your life, your family and your community?

Your new house will surely transform your lives and we also believe that you and your family can be a powerful force for change in your community. We want to encourage you that your ideas and opinions are valuable and can lead to action that causes transformation. In fact, within the next month, one of our YWAM staff members would like to visit your family, hear more about your experience, and encourage you as you move forward as a family. During this visit, we would also like to ask you several questions about your experience with Homes of Hope and the impact that it had on your life and your family.

We wanted to share with you in advance some of the topics we would like your feedback on so below are some of the questions we will be asking. In the days and weeks to come, would you review the questions below in preparation for our talk? We appreciate your honesty in all of the topics addressed here because it helps us make the house construction better for future families. Thank you for taking the time to think about these things, and we really look forward to seeing you again soon!

Sincerely, your Homes of Hope staff

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During our follow-up interview, we will ask you to comment on these areas, among other things:

- What the most meaningful part of the build was for you?
- What is the biggest change your family has experienced as a result of receiving a new home?
- Have you seen a change in your family's health, economy and education after the house build? If so, what have you noticed?
- In what ways were you able to connect with the foreign team members and our YWAM staff during the build?
- How were you personally involved in the construction process?
- How did the house build experience impact your view of God and your relationship with him?
- Has your way of thinking about the future changed now that you have a safe, stable home for your family?

We will also ask you to rate the physical aspects of the construction of your house (roofing, windows, floor, etc.) on a scale from 1 to 5.

### **Family Follow Up Survey**

This document provides a questionnaire for YWAM staff to conduct with HOH recipient families. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the family's experience with Homes of Hope and what the new house means for them in terms of their thinking and actions. It also addresses practical issues with the house build that will help YWAM improve the experience for future recipient families.

This survey is not intended to be used as a highly structured interview because “rigidly adhering to predetermined questions may not allow you to access participants’ perspectives and understandings of the world” (Merriam and Tisdell 109). Instead, questions are open-ended and exploratory, meant to provoke conversation with previous house recipients. The questions do not necessarily need to be presented with this exact wording or in the order that is laid out here. Instead, the interviewer should be flexible and “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam and Tisdell 111). The interview should feel like a talk between friends and maintaining a respectful relationship with the HOH family should always take priority in the interview process. All answers should be received with compassion and empathy, leaving space for counseling or spiritual ministry as the YWAM staff feel led.

This questionnaire can be done within one month of a house build, although the true impact of a home will be better evaluated after more time has passed. Also, in this highly relational culture, interviewers should expect to spend at least two hours conducting the survey and it should take place in the Homes of Hope house in order to make observations regarding the family's new life as well. Interviewers should make an appointment with the family to ensure that they have space in their schedule while respecting their other obligations. This interview

should be directed at the head of the household with other family members participating as they are available. It is especially important that, in the case of a two-parent household, the father is in attendance because it respects the male dominance in this highly masculine society (Hofstede 140-141). All questions will be asked in Spanish, the local language.



## Family Follow Up Survey

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### A. Family Information

- a. Family Name (*two last names*)
- b. Names of family members participating in the survey
- c. Address (*community name, minimum*)
- d. Contact phone number (*in case of further questions or clarification*)

### B. House Build Details

- a. Please briefly describe for us how your family was living prior to receiving a Homes of Hope house.
- b. How long ago was your house build?
- c. Did you move into your new house immediately? If not, how long have you been living in your new house?
- d. How did your family prepare for the house build in the days leading up to it?

### C. Physical condition of the house

- a. Is this the house you were expecting to receive? Is there something different that you did not expect?
- b. Did we meet your expectations? In what way?
- c. What is your opinion regarding the quality of the house? Is there anything that is faulty or does not work as it should?
- d. Please give us your opinion on the following aspects of your house, rating the quality of each area 1-5 (1 meaning poor and 5 meaning excellent) and commenting on your judgement:
  - i. Roof
  - ii. Windows
  - iii. Concrete floor
  - iv. Walls
  - v. Paint job
  - vi. Electrical wiring/Lights
  - vii. Perceived Warmth
  - viii. Additional comments

e. Furniture

- i. What has been the most useful item of furniture that was given to you along with your house? Why have you found it useful?
- ii. Are there any parts of the furniture package that you think it would be beneficial to change for future home recipients?

D. Perceived Changes as a Result of the Home

- a. How have you adapted the home to fit your family's specific lifestyle?
- b. Have you noticed any difference in your children's education or ability to study after moving into your new house? If so, what changes have you noticed?
- c. Have you noticed any difference in your health or that of your children's after moving into your house? If there were health issues present in the family prior to the house build, have these problems been alleviated at all?
- d. How has the new house impacted your family's economy? If you were investing into building or home repairs before, do you think you will make more or less financial investment into your new house?

E. Relational Connection

a. STM Team Participants

- i. How did you feel working alongside the foreigners?
- ii. Were you able to feel connected to the team members? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
- iii. Do you remember any of the team members' names?
- iv. Is there anything prior to the team's arrival that you would have liked to know about them?
- v. How important is it for you to stay in contact with the team that came to serve with you on the house build? Are you currently in contact with any build team members?
- vi. Did you feel like you were able to express yourself at the house dedication? If not, what could have been done to facilitate better communication for you?



- vii. Was there ever a time during the construction process when you felt hurt or offended by any of the visitors? If so, can you please describe what happened?
  - b. YWAM Staff
    - i. Were you able to distinguish between the local YWAM staff and the foreign team members? If so, how?
    - ii. Do you remember any of the YWAM staff members' names that served with you on the house build?
    - iii. Is there anything that the YWAM staff did during the build that really meant a lot to you? If so, please describe.
  - c. Local Community members
    - i. Were any of your neighbors involved in the construction of your house? If so, how did they get involved and what did they do? Also, why do you think they came to participate?
    - ii. What was your neighbors' response to your new home? Have you received any positive comments and if so, what were they? Have you had any negative interactions with neighbors as a result of your house build?
  - d. Beneficiary Family
    - i. *In the case of a two-parent household:* Have you seen a change in your marriage after the house build? Can you describe it? Why do you think this change occurred?
    - ii. Have you seen a change in your relationship with your children after the house build? If so, please describe. Why do you think this change occurred?
    - iii. Have you seen a change in the relationship between your children after the house build? If so, in what way? Why do you think this change occurred?
- F. Participation
- a. In what way did you participate during the construction of your house?
  - b. Did you clearly understand the steps that were being taken throughout the weekend to complete the construction?

- c. Did you feel like you and your children were safe during the construction process? Was there anything that made you feel unsafe? Were there any accidents on the build that you are aware of?
- d. Would you have liked to be more involved in the build in some way? If so, how do you think we could have helped you to be more involved?

G. Spiritual Impact

- a. Did you feel that there was a spiritual impact in your life as a result of the house build? If so, what was it about the experience that impacted you spiritually?
- b. Do you feel any closer to God now? To what extent? Why do you believe that is?
- c. Do you believe that God had some role in bringing the foreign team to build your house? If so, how?
- d. How has your view or understanding about who God is changed as a result of this house build?
- e. Did you have a Bible prior to the house build? If so, did you read it? Do you read the Bible now? If so, can you tell us more about the impact of the Bible in your life and family?
- f. Were you attending church before the build? If so, which one? If not, do you attend a church now?
- g. Were you connected with a local church during the build? If so, which one and in what way?
- h. Did you consider yourself a Christian before the build? Are you a Christian now? *If they were Christians prior to the build:* Were you encouraged in your faith as a result of the house build? If so, how?
- i. Did anyone talk to you about Jesus Christ during the build? If so, what did they share with you? *At this point, the interviewer should be able to share the Gospel message if they did not hear it or understand it during the house build.*

H. Thinking about the Future

- a. Have you considered any changes you would like to make to your home in the future? If so, which changes are you considering?
- b. Have you considered starting a small business out of your new home? If so, tell us more about that.

- c. Have you considered ways that you could help others in your community? In what way? Have you taken any action to serve others in your community recently?
- d. After receiving your home, are you more or less likely to invest into your community? Why?
- e. Have you ever lived in the United States or considered moving there? If so, has the new home changed your thinking regarding this?
- f. How has your new home changed the way you think about your children's future?

I. General

- a. What was your favorite or most meaningful part of the build for you?
- b. What is the biggest change your family has experienced as a result of receiving a new home?
- c. Are you proud of your new home? Why or why not? What are you most proud of?
- d. How do you think you have personally changed as a result of this experience?
- e. What do you think you will remember most about the house building experience in the future?

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