

Preparation Guide

Practical Helps for Those Preparing for a Short Term Mission Trip or Missions Vacation Bible School



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INTRODUCTION

Vacation Bible School...we all know this term...we all know what it means. We know that it means ministering to children - a lot of preparation – a big budget – lots of workers – and on and on. But what does VBS mean when you are thinking about a mission trip – especially a mission trip south of the border? There is one simple guideline to remember when preparing to participate in a MVBS (Mission Vacation Bible School)...

Vacation Bible School south of the border is nothing like VBS stateside!

This guide is intended to help you plan and prepare for your MVBS using some of the same techniques that we are accustomed to using in preparing for VBS stateside but adapting these techniques to meet the specific needs you will face on the mission field. This is by no means a comprehensive guide that is going to eliminate all of the obstacles that you may face on the field. Rather it is intended to help you be as prepared as possible so that when the unexpected occurs (and it will occur!) you will be able to meet your challenges head on and help the members of your team to do the same.

The following questions will serve as the steps you need to follow as you prepare to participate in a MVBS...

Step 1 – Why prepare for and participate in a Mission Vacation Bible School?

Step 2 – What to expect during a MVBS?

Step 3 – How do we get started?

Step 4 – How do we prepare the team to participate in our MVBS?

Step 5 - What happens when our MVBS is completed?

For you as the reader it is important to note that this material is written from a very distinctive standpoint. It is assumed that as the MVBS director you are working in conjunction with your mission team leader in the planning and preparation of your trip and that as leaders of the trip you are working in partnership with a field missionary or national pastor. This material is a guide to help you in your planning and preparation but it is in no way intended to serve as the only set of ideas that will work on the field. Your first and primary source of information for planning should be your field contact – ie. missionary, pastor or lay leader. No one can guide you better concerning the details you need to know than the people on the field that will be working in conjunction with you and your team. These people are assets which cannot be over-valued. Listen to what they have to say – consider their ideas – and then pray and ask the Lord to show you how you and your team can effectively come alongside these workers in a way that will complement and further their ministry goals.



STEP 1 – WHY PARTICIPATE IN A MISSION VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL?

Participating in a mission trip in a country other than your own can truly be a life changing experience. There are very few people who participate in a short term mission trip to a foreign country that return home unchanged. Why is that? What is so radical about being in another country ministering to people? The answer is quite simple. For one short period of time – usually a week to ten days – you step out of your day to day life and become vulnerable to the moving of the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the needs of the world. Once you have travelled outside of your world (and comfort zone) your eyes will begin to adjust their focus – you will come to realize that the needs you thought you had were really only wants – you will come to realize that there is a world in desperate need of Christ and that your job is to share Him with every person you encounter.

Many Christians think that missions work is something relegated only to those who are ‘called’ to go. Oftentimes we encounter people within our churches who memorize scriptures beautifully, tithe regularly and attend church services without fail, and in so doing feel they have completed their ‘requirements’ as a follower of Christ. But if we honestly examine the *PROMISE* of God’s Word, His *COMMAND* to His people, and the *INSTRUCTIONS* He left us there can be no escaping the fact that missions is not relegated to anyone – it has been designated to each and every one of us who claim to be children of God.

THE PROMISE....

“WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” Romans 10:13

THE COMMAND....

“...you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Acts 1:8

THE INSTRUCTION...

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

The question many people ask is this...”Why travel to a foreign country to share my faith when there are so many people that need to hear about Christ right here at home?” This is a valid question because the truth is there are untold numbers of people that each of us encounter every day that need to hear the gospel. They need to hear the gospel but rarely do we think to share our faith with those we encounter on a daily basis. However, this changes for many short term missionaries who participate in a MVBS.



Participating in a MVBS is a very practical and effective way for you to experience the blessing of sharing your faith. For some, participating in a MVBS will be the first time they will experience telling someone else about Jesus Christ – it may be the first but certainly not the last time.

So why participate in a MVBS? The truth is there are many reasons. The first and most important goal anyone should have in their mind and heart when preparing for this type of activity is to share the message of the gospel with people that may not otherwise have an opportunity to hear the truth. Secondly, you along with your team members may have the opportunity to assist and bless people with great emotional or physical needs. Third, as a participant you will see the Lord work in and through your life – a blessing that cannot be explained only experienced. There are many other reasons that could be listed – in fact, it would be a list longer than you could imagine. But instead of focusing on what the reasons might be, let us accept the challenge that has been set before us to go and share the Good News – and let's get to work!



STEP 2 – WHAT TO EXPECT DURING A MVBS?

Whether you are a seasoned world traveler or a well-established homebody we all have pre-conceived ideas of what will happen once on the mission field and working in a MVBS. Before going any further let's get one thing out of the way....LEAVE THOSE PRECONCEIVED IDEAS BEHIND! Whether this is your first trip or your tenth there is no way to anticipate what your experience will be like – no two people have the same experience on a trip and no two trips are alike. The same can be said for VBS in the States – no two churches have the same VBS – no two workers have the same experience – no two children experience the same level of learning. And without a doubt, there will never be a stateside VBS and MVBS alike. So let's begin our work with a blank slate – beginning with the simplest of points and building from there.

Scheduling and Locations...

There are a few basic questions that you need to have answered as early on as possible in your preparation. The answers to these questions will help you formulate your overall MVBS plan and select a curriculum and format that will best fit your location and scheduling needs. If you are working with a missionary or national pastor be sure to ask up front the following questions:

- *Daytime or Evening?* Will you be hosting a MVBS that is during the day or in the evening? This is important to know because your team will need to be prepared in regards to proper clothing and adequate water to handle the assigned location.
- *Location?* Another important question you need to ask is about the physical location of the MVBS – will you be inside or outside – will you be in a church, mission, someone's home, open field or just where. The answers to these questions will help you determine what type of equipment you may need to have on hand and what types of crafts may or may not be suitable given the location.
- *Electricity?* If you plan on carrying electric guitars, sound systems and electric glue guns to use in the MVBS and there is no electricity in the location where you are working – well, let's just say you are going to be thrown a curve ball. It is much better to know well in advance of the MVBS if there is electricity on site or not. Based on the answer you can adjust your plans accordingly.
- *Tables and chairs?* Just as important as the question about electricity is to remember to ask if there are tables and/or chairs onsite – and if not – if there is a church or mission that could possibly loan tables and chairs for the duration of the MVBS. If neither option is possible it will be helpful to carry with you large tarps for the children and other participants to use to sit on the ground – both for the story time and craft time. If no type of tables or chairs are available it may be necessary to adjust your craft plans to work around this situation.



Once you have the answers to the previous questions it is time to begin thinking about your curriculum and activities to be included in the MVBS – activities like games... stories and dramas...crafts...music... snacks...and much more. Whatever curriculum you decide on it is important to remember to include plans for children, youth, and adults.

In addition, give some consideration to the following points when choosing a curriculum or soliciting the help of someone to write your curriculum.

Use of pre-packaged kits:

- Advantages:
 - Provide a theme and normally have an all-inclusive lesson plan.
 - Provide promotional materials.
 - Usually have experienced writers working together to produce the materials.
- Disadvantages:
 - Not always easy to find kits in Spanish that are appropriate for a true Hispanic culture. Oftentimes the Spanish materials are written for Hispanic communities that have formed within the United States. The needs of Hispanic nationals are very different from transplanted Hispanics.
 - Cost may be prohibitive.

Writing/creating your own materials:

- Advantages:
 - Can be tailor-designed to your needs and the needs of the area where you will be working.
 - Most likely will not be very costly.
- Disadvantages:
 - Time consuming to write and assemble.

Biblically sound:

Check closely to be sure that the lessons are biblically sound. In other words, are the lessons based on the Word of God and the Word of God alone? Whether using a pre-packaged kit or looking to someone to write the material – investigate their doctrinal statement of beliefs.

Now that you have answered the questions above and completed your investigation of the materials that are available you should be able to make a well-informed decision about the curriculum you will be using in the MVBS.

Now it is time to actually get started pulling things together.



STEP 3 – HOW DO WE GET STARTED?

Budget

Before making the first purchase or even considering making purchases it is very important to assess your budget. Decide early on what amount of funding you will have available to work with for the purchase of necessary materials. If you are working with a limited budget (as most of us do) there will most likely be items that you can collect or ask for donations. Do not be afraid to let people know what types of things are needed for the MVBS. Oftentimes there will be people within your church who cannot participate in a mission trip for one reason or another but can and will want to help provide things needed for the trip.

Team of Workers

Forming the MVBS team early on in your planning will help each member feel that they have a place of importance in the overall plan for the trip. If you are fortunate enough to have veteran MVBS participants, match them up with first-timers or less experienced participants. Consider having a good-balance of youth and adult workers wherever and whenever it is possible.

Job Descriptions

Once the team has been formed each member needs to understand their role and responsibility in the MVBS. One of the easiest ways to communicate everyone's responsibilities is by compiling a list of each job/position and the responsibility of each. For example:

MVBS Director: The MVBS Director is responsible for the overall planning of the MVBS. The Director is responsible for recruiting all of the workers and assigning their job assignments.

Teacher: Teachers are responsible for studying and preparing the lesson that will be shared with each age-group (children, youth, and adults).

Craft Leader: The craft leader along with his/her support team should assume the responsibility for preparing the crafts for each age-group. The craft leader will want to make an example of each of the crafts in advance of the MVBS so as to be familiar with the assembly procedure for each craft. ***The craft leader needs to keep in mind that it will be necessary to have crafts on hand for all ages – children, youth and adults, and always prepare for more participants than you think will be present.***

Snack Leader: The snack leader is responsible (along with his/her) support team for preparing the snack each day and checking at the end of each day to see if there are enough supplies on hand for the following day's activities.

Activity/Game Leader: The activity/game leader is responsible for selecting games and gathering all of the supplies/equipment needed for each game. In addition, the activity/game leader should teach his/her support team how to participate in each game.



STEP 4 – HOW DO WE PREPARE THE TEAM TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR MVBS?

Preparation is the key to success.

When preparing for a MVBS it is important to remember that you need to prepare not only in regards to materials and supplies but much more importantly each and every member of the team needs to be spiritually prepared. There are many great mission trip devotionals available that can be useful in the time leading up to a trip, during the trip, and once the team has returned home. In addition to using a devotional with the team it will be important to have the prayer support of the entire church body – praying weekly for the many preparations and during the trip itself.

Training meetings are also an important element of the preparation time leading up to the trip. During these meetings you will have the opportunity to share important details about the logistics of the trip, listen to testimonies of prior trip experiences, and discuss details regarding the MVBS. Take advantage of these meetings to not only share logistics but discuss the overall structure of the MVBS and the materials that the team will be using.

Leading people to Christ is another topic that needs to be addressed in the time leading up to the trip and subsequent MVBS. It is crucial that each and every team member knows how to share his/her faith in leading someone to Christ. One of the best ways to go about this – especially in a foreign culture – is simply sharing your own personal testimony of how the Lord came into your life. Oftentimes by sharing your own salvation experience people will be drawn to Christ. Encourage each and every team member to take the time to write down their personal testimony in advance of the trip. Also, encourage them to try and limit their testimony to something they can share in about a two-minute span of time. In today's world people don't often allow us much time – especially when it comes to sharing our faith. A concise testimony can be one of the most effective tools in a person's "evangelism arsenal".

Sharing one on one (with the help of a translator) is certainly one way of sharing your faith and leading people to Christ. However, in addition, when talking about the MVBS setting there will come a time at least once during the week when a call to salvation will need to be offered. If working with a local pastor during the MVBS it is highly recommended to share this time with him and allow the nationals to identify with the local pastor. After you and the team depart for home it will be up to the local pastor and/or missionary to follow up with and disciple each person. This process will be much easier if from the very beginning the people can identify with the local pastor. Obviously if there is no local pastor present then it will be important to delegate the responsibility of giving an invitation to one of the pastors travelling with your team.



Cultural sensitivity is yet another area that your team will want to focus on prior to the trip. Whether you have seasoned veterans or first timers in the group it is important to take a little time to focus on learning a little about the culture you will be visiting. For the first timers there will be lots of questions about what to expect and for the seasoned veterans it is important for them to take a fresh look at the culture and examine what changes have occurred since their last visit. Here are just a few things that all team members will want to take note of prior to their trip...

- Time Zone – Matamoros is on Central Standard Time.
- Language – over 90% of the people in the border area speak only Spanish but you will encounter bilingual individuals that you'll have the opportunity to work with. Don't be intimidated by the language barriers because God can work through that and everything else!
- Greetings -
 - In Mexico people greet with a kiss on the cheek. They are usually given from woman to woman, woman to a man, and man to man (but only if you are family). When you first meet a Mexican national they usually stick to a handshake but do not be alarmed if they approach you for a kiss.
 - Kisses vs. hugs – people do hug in Mexico, but as mentioned earlier, kisses on the cheek are the traditional way of greeting each other and saying goodbye.
- Religion – in Mexico, as well as, in all of Latin America, Catholicism is very prevalent but in many parts of the country it is more a tradition than a way of life. Many people are deeply rooted in Catholicism because they see it as a characteristic of WHO they are as a person and as a nation.
- Poverty – you will be in areas of poverty but you won't find yourself faced with such socioeconomic differences that you won't be able to relate to the people you are working with.
 - Providing for special needs and giving gifts or money – If you are in a mission location we recommend that you not give money to individuals. If you feel the need to give funds to someone, offer those funds to the pastor, the person responsible for the mission, or the missionary and they will distribute the funds at an appropriate time.
 - *If you are in a tourist area, be aware that there are American panhandlers that work on the Mexican side of the border. As you would use common sense in your own hometown apply the same logic to these situations.*



- Driving – It is highly recommended that whenever possible you rely on the local pastor and/or missionary to handle the driving for you while in country. If you find yourself in a situation where you must drive yourself please note the following information that is provided by Sanborn's Insurance:

"Please be aware of your surroundings; stay alert. Mexico's government continues with their war against drug cartels. For most Mexicans, this war is something that they read in the media, not something they are experiencing. This is also true for tourists, and this war is far from tourist spots and resorts.

The State Department's Office of American Citizens Services and Crisis Management (ACS) administers the Consular Information Program, which informs the public of conditions abroad that may affect their safety and security. Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings are vital parts of this program."

Department of State Country information, Travel alerts and Travel Warnings in effect for Mexico

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_970.html

- While traveling in vehicles in Matamoros it is HIGHLY recommended that you not accept or make cell phone calls or engage in texting – this applies whether you are a driver or a passenger. The military has a strong presence in our area. Their patrols on the streets – both day and night – are a regular part of daily life here. One of the safety precautions they have provided the general public is when driving if you pass or come upon a military convoy or group of soldiers stationed on the streets – DO NOT talk on your cell phone or radios because for the safety of the soldiers they have to view this as someone potentially 'tipping off the bad guys' as to their location. You may be stopped, searched and questioned if this occurs. Therefore – we recommend that all team members refrain from using cell phones while in transit during your stay in Matamoros.
- If your team plans on bringing their own vehicles into Mexico it is strongly recommended that prior to your departure you check with Mexican customs and/or the local missionary to determine if your vehicle is allowed and recommendable for use in country. Also, check with your vehicle insurance provider to verify if your current coverage is adequate for the border areas and if not obtain short term vehicle insurance for the area of the country where your team will be working for the duration of your stay.



- What to expect in our church services - one of the things that visitors to El Divino Salvador tell us all the time is that it is one of the friendliest places on earth. You WILL be welcomed with open arms as you join us for services. Our worship is a mix of traditional songs and hymns that so many people identify with combined with contemporary choruses. And when it comes time for the Word of God to be preached – that is exactly what will happen!
- For the safety and privacy of our pastors and local missionaries it is highly recommended that any financial gifts designated for a particular pastor or missionary be presented privately. Due to the increased level of corruption that we are experiencing, many local congregations have unfortunately seen their pastors threatened with death and/or kidnapping of themselves and/or family members if they did not turn over any and all church finances. To protect our pastors/missionaries/and even to a certain extent our deacons we no longer present financial gifts to them in public so as not to draw attention to them receiving cash. We understand that oftentimes team members have given sacrificially so that these special offerings can be provided but given our current situation we hope that all will understand the reasoning behind this recommendation. If there is any question of accountability concerned or need for charitable receipts for the purposes of bookkeeping for the team or sponsoring church please request the assistance of the local missionary in facilitating this.
- No hand-held radios should be used during your stay. Restrict communication to land lines, cell phones and internet.
- Dress
 - As a church we are fairly conservative (i.e. no short shorts!) Apply the rule that most school districts use – to stay on the safe side, keep shorts knee length (approx). And as an additional note – you won't typically see any of us wearing shorts to church.
 - Footwear – dress appropriately given your place of service. For example, do not wear flip-flops if you're going to be in a construction site! Flip-flops are ok, though, if you go to do VBS at the beach!
- Teenager Tips – one of the things we hope you notice after spending a little time with us is that we like to spend time hanging out and we will definitely enjoy hanging out with you. Probably within your first 48 hours of being with us you will feel like part of the family – at least we hope so. But as you become more 'comfortable' hanging out with our teens it is important to remember that they will not cross certain lines of respect with you and it will be very uncomfortable for them if those lines are crossed by you.



Other Useful Information:

- Weather – It will be HOT. Expect no lower than 90 degrees in the daytime and no lower than 80 degrees in the nighttime (approx). Be prepared with sunscreen and bug repellent!
- Drinking Water and Other Edibles –
 - Do NOT drink water from the faucets. The bottled water provided in stores are fine though.
 - As far as food goes, use your very best judgment.
- Health
 - Personal medications – bring your own medications that you need for the period of time you will be here. It is strongly recommended that you bring your prescriptions in their actual prescription bottles with your name on each one!
 - There IS quality medical service on both sides of the border. If you have insurance it may be accepted on the Mexican side of the border. Bring it with you!
- Money – the exchange rate is approximately at 17 pesos to the dollar but it varies. It is preferred that you always have pesos with you to pay for whatever you need to purchase, but if you don't have some on you, do not think you cannot proceed with your purchases.
- Bridges – there are 3 main bridges in Matamoros.
 - The “Old Bridge” is the one with the railroad tracks that leads out to Calle Sexta.
 - The “New Bridge” is the one that is by the “big” Garcías.
 - The Bridge “Los Tomates” is the one by the road to the beach.



STEP 5 - WHAT HAPPENS WHEN OUR MVBS IS COMPLETED?

Your time on the field will fly by and be over before you even realize what has occurred. Do your best to enjoy each and every moment and take advantage of the opportunities the Lord gives you in ministering to and reaching others with the message of the Gospel. As a team member you are going to want to be involved in everything you possibly can. If the Lord has provided for you to participate in a mission trip He has a specific purpose for you – find out what that purpose is and go after it with all your heart.

It is very likely that during your time on the field you are going to develop relationships with people and feel a need to make a lasting impact on their lives. The most important thing to remember is just by your presence you will have made a lasting impact. If, however, you feel led to leave a monetary gift with someone it is highly recommended that you give those funds to the local pastor or missionary and express your desire for the money to be given to a specific person. The reason for this is that oftentimes the local pastor or missionary may know things about the overall situation of the person that could influence your decision to provide a financial gift. The second reason is that if your gift is in the hands of the local pastor or missionary they will be able to give your gift to the indicated person in private and as a result you will not be drawing attention to yourself. Not drawing attention to yourself in regards to money is very important because you never know who may be observing you.

Above all, when the work is done and the suitcases have been unpacked at home remember to pray for those you encountered during your time on the field. You most likely will not know the impact you had until you reach Paradise but you can be assured that if you have done all in accordance to the Lord's will—He will use you for His glory.

"Lost people matter to God, and so they must matter to us." — Keith Wright



