



**PRESBYTERIAN
DISASTER
ASSISTANCE**
OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE

PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP FOR WORK TEAMS

“Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, *striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.*” Philippians 1:27

We send work teams because an invitation has been extended to us to come and help with the witness to recovery in a particular part of the world or the United States.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance only sets up recovery sites where churches have decided to invite others in to help as they seek to rebuild after disasters. Thus it is the local church partner, council, or faith based organization that has done the assessment, determined the nature of the work, and made all of the arrangements to provide for the arrival of volunteers.

When we accept the invitation to come work, that acceptance also brings responsibility.

We are sent into communities as ambassadors of the particular church or council that has issued the invitation. Our behavior and relationships in the community where we work will directly reflect on our partner for good or for bad long after we have left. It is by virtue of our relationship with our partner that we come introduced to communities as an extended branch of the family of faith.

We go recognizing the historical mission and ministry of our partners in that area.

In many areas of the world we have partners that have labored for years to minister to communities who have only recently experienced disasters of the nature that require work teams. For example, in Nicaragua and Honduras (where we sent numerous work teams for post-Mitch rehabilitation work) our partners have programs of development in communities that span over 10-15 years. It is our partners who remain to minister in season and out of season long after outside groups have packed up and returned home.

We go where we are very often in unequal power relationships and where gifts that we give can be reminders of that inequality.

"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave..."
Philippians 2:4-7

We are challenged to consider Christ as our model. Christ emptied himself of all power, of all riches, to come to us humbly in human form. When we go into communities and then leave special gifts, or change a partner's priorities by funding special programs directly, then in essence we are sending a number of serious messages to that community. Among the messages we must be careful *not* to send are the following:

- I have more wealth than you
- I can solve your problems
- I have more resources and should be respected more than the local church, council, etc.

Always we have the choice to either meet our own emotional needs or to choose to humble ourselves in Christ-like simplicity.

We make a difference when we see accompaniment as a core value and when we recognize that we have much to learn.

Often the work that we do is not that important, however, being present is. Funds we spend to travel could be used to provide local jobs and income. So why do we go? We go so people will know they are not forgotten, we go to stand alongside and offer encouragement, we go to learn about where God is active in the world, and we go to learn about ourselves by seeing how others find strength and how our partners support them in the process of recovery.

We go having a servant's heart.

There is a wonderful song, the words of which include "Won't you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too." There are profound spiritual truths in those words. We must not only seek to serve, but find the grace to accept the warm hospitality and invitation extended to us to be part of a community for a while as they work towards recovery. Why would we ever want to damage that tender arrangement by upsetting the balance with large monetary gifts?

We understand that by strengthening our partner's sensitive and empowering work in the communities we work toward the day when all will experience life abundant.

The best thing we can do after participating in a work team is to give our gifts in secret by giving our gifts to the local partner. We urge work teams to give generously to the partner that their work with the communities may continue, and that the work will be equitable for all communities. "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Matthew 6:2-4 By giving in secret to the partner, we honor God and learn to subject our own need for affirmation to the greater needs of others.