

GUIDE TO PLANNING MISSION TRIPS TO THE GULF COAST

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The following general guidelines for planning mission trips to the Gulf Coast were established by Katrina Relief Task Force coordinators Barbara Stowe and Carol Kingston as they organized the March 2006 adult mission trip to Biloxi, MS. We hope that the parties who are sponsoring a mission trip can make most of the arrangements. For assistance in planning and execution of a mission to the Gulf Coast or New Orleans please contact our priest-in-residence on the Gulf Coast, the Rev. Jane B Bearden at gulfcoast@diomass.org.

BEFORE YOU RECRUIT

Items 1-8 address information that the leaders will need to know before they recruit volunteers.

1. **Identify a Group Coordinator(s)** -- This person will organize the trip.

- Making contact with the Gulf Coast
- Arranging flight reservations
- Recruiting volunteers
- Maintaining paperwork, and more.

2. **Determine Type of Mission Group, e.g., Adult, Youth, or Family.**

3. **Determine the Approximate Number of Participants**

4. **Determine Trip Dates**

5. **RESEARCH: Explore Disaster Relief Centers on the Gulf Coast and learn about the issues**

Some possible resources:

- Camp Coast Care <http://www.campcoastcare.com/>
- Mission on the Bay http://www.campcoastcare.com/index_Page860.htm
- Camp Biloxi <http://campbiloxi.com/>
- Camp Victor <http://www.campvictor.org/>
- Gulfside Assembly http://www.sejumc.org/ministries_agencies.aspx?id=33
- Habitat <http://www.habitat.org/gulfrecoveryeffort/>
- Diocese of Louisiana http://edola.org/odr_main.php
- St Paul;s NOLA http://www.stpaulschurchno.org/spc_homecoming_center.htm
- St Anna's NOLA <http://www.stannanola.org/>
- The Steps Coalition <http://www.stepscoalition.org/>
- PBS Report <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11162007/watch2.html>
- IDTF <http://www.msdtf.org/>

6. **Work to be Done and On-site Logistics**

- Determine what skills will be needed at the time of your trip.
- Request an orientation packet if one is available.

- Inquire about accommodations available for volunteers including specifics such as: sleeping accommodations, meal provision, bathroom and shower facilities and safety considerations. *It is **critical** that volunteers know what the living conditions will be.*
- Ask about special requirements, such as the need for updated tetanus shots and other medical requirements.
- Ask if there physical requirements, ability to lift, etc.
- Ask how the daily work schedule and duties are organized and by whom. **This is important information for the coordinator to determine.**
- Ask if it is expected that groups coming will organize themselves into small work groups with designated group leaders. How much supervision the host camp will provide? **Obtain as many specifics about this as possible so that you can go prepared.**
- Ask if work tools and equipment will be provided.
- Ask if your group is expected to provide its own ground travel to work sites.
- Ask what the individual or group accommodation cost will be.

7. Travel Details

- You may want to work with a travel agent, but many of the details can be addressed locally.
- Airfare – Ask about group rates and the particulars of purchasing for a group such as the cancellation policy for individuals, if names can be substituted and substitution dead lines.
- Determine method of travel to and from the airport.
- If your group is expected to provide its own transportation to work sites determine how many vans will be needed and the cost per van.

8. Cost

- Determine the cost per person, which will include airfare, ground travel, and accommodations.
- Determine how the cost will be covered. Possibilities include: by the individual participants, fund raising, a combination of the two, or other.

FORMING & RECRUITING A TEAM

1. Recruiting Volunteers

- Advertise your mission trip opportunity. The method will vary depending on the sponsoring group. Parish trips may be promoted and advertised locally by way of parish newsletters, Sunday bulletins, and service announcement times. Be creative.
- Broader advertisement may include FYI, the diocesan web site, contacting former mission trip participants, some of whom have expressed wanting to go back. The Rev Jane Bearden will be able to assist in identifying those persons.
- When advertising, include basic trip information, such as:
 - The type of trip being planned (adult, youth or family)
 - Trip destination (MS or LA)
 - Dates
 - Skills needed by participants. People will want to know what will be expected of them.
 - Cost per participant
 - Accurate and clear information concerning the accommodations

- Provide contact information for the trip coordinator so that interested individuals can obtain more details and/or register for the trip.
- You might want to create an application form or a database to gather participant information such as name, address, phone numbers, email address and any other information you deem necessary.
- Medical volunteer participants on mission trips are responsible for obtaining a temporary professional license to practice their specialty in either Louisiana or Mississippi. Information for obtaining these licenses will be provided.

2. Registering Participants

- Determine how you will select participants. Considerations include:
 - Does the person have the work skills identified as needed for this particular trip? (Home Depot offers building skills workshops free of charge.) Participants do not have to be highly skilled, but they must have some ability in the required skill area, aptitude and willingness to learn. You really need to trust what the participant tells you about this. Camp Biloxi suggests that every non-skilled worker should have a skilled worker mentor. This is important planning information to have. It may not work out ideally but this is a good goal. Participants will want to feel needed and helpful.
 - Is it the overall impression that this person is flexible and would work well as part of a team?
 - Does the person meet the specified physical requirements?
 - References may be appropriate if the applicant is not well known.
- Mail any information provided by the host camp to each participant and request completion of any forms, e.g., medical releases requested by the Gulf Coast organization. (Camp Biloxi provides an Orientation Packet, which contains forms that must be completed and returned to them prior to the trip. These include medical forms and completed skill sheets letting them know what skills people will be bringing.)

3. Holding an Information Meeting

About two weeks before the trip hold an information meeting; plan for two hours. If you have access to a computer, the Rev. Jane Bearden may be able to set up a web conference to allow her to participate in the meeting.

- Provide a spiritual context.
- Provide icebreaker activities. People will begin to gel as a group at this meeting.
- Tell people as much as possible about what to expect.
- Ask former mission trip participants to attend your meeting if possible.
- Show CDs provided by the Gulf Coast and photos taken on previous trips. You can get these from the Diocese or from Rev Jane.
- Serve refreshments.
- Collect required completed forms.
- Collect required payments if not collected before this point.
- Go over information about meeting at the airport. Introduce the person who has been identified as the group leader, who will:
 - Greet and check people off as they arrive at the airport.
 - Serve as the "go-to" person throughout the trip

- Carry and deliver medical forms to the volunteer host camp
- Hold copies of the medical forms marked "confidential" and copies of the completed skill sheets that were sent to the host camp on the Gulf Coast.
- Be sure that all members of the group have their flight confirmation numbers when they go to the airport so that check in will go quickly smoothly.

ON THE TRIP

Provide For Worship Opportunities

A former mission trip participant emphasized how important it was for him and for the group he was with to be able to meet together at the end of each day to share experiences, pray and worship. The following suggestions are from Bill Theisen, R.N., a member of St. Paul's in Malden.

- Have a designated chaplain. "A clergy person is an essential member of every team."
- Schedule time every evening for sharing, prayer, and worship.
- Make up worship booklets with the order of evening prayer and/or compline, psalms and some hymns.

Upon Your Return

Follow up is a crucial part of the community and faith building aspects of mission. Remember to set aside time for group conversation in order to framing the event within the context of God's action in the lives of both the individuals and the community. Then find ways to share your experience with others so that many lives might be enriched through your experience.