

## Module 9

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### How to choose the right mission agency

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I was recently at a missions conference where hundreds of agencies were represented! All displaying their colorful, inviting booths and handing out Snickers and the newest attention grabber – the compass, globe ball, key chain, all kinds of things! I'm sure that those who came to the conference shopping for a mission agency were completely overwhelmed. Worse than that, if one doesn't know what they're looking for they run the risk of committing to the agency with the most exciting booth or the brochure with the best graphics!

There are thousands of mission agencies in existence today. It is so important that the person looking to go on a short or long-term trip knows what to look for when choosing an agency. Think about it – you are going to spend at least two months in a foreign country where you know nothing and no one. People take their vacation very seriously. They want to know where they will be, what the accommodations will be like, what kind of crowd it draws, how much money it will be, how they will get around, if it is in a safe neighborhood, etc. How much more care should be taken in choosing a mission agency or trip.

Many times students are sidelined from getting involved in missions for one of three reasons: 1) they feel paralyzed by a lack of knowledge about how to move forward, 2) they know one or two options and aren't satisfied with what they offer or 3) they are so overwhelmed with possibilities that they never decide.

When a student approaches you in need of counsel on choosing a mission agency, be prepared with the resources. Below is an outline of the process you will walk the student through. It would be helpful for you to have done much of the research in advance and to already have in mind agencies you recommend before you start to look. Help the student to think through places they would like to go or certain experiences they would like to have. For example, if the student is a pre-med major and has a particular interest in Hindus, these two details will narrow down your list of options. If they have no prior interests, that's fine too.

It really comes down to research, prayer, and asking the right questions. Be diligent to talk to your church and others who are more experienced. Read magazine articles and even search some good websites before you decide. Give yourself plenty of time to gather research. As you are doing this, the Holy Spirit will guide you as you meet the right people and narrow the choices.

The goal is to collect a wide-range list of mission agencies and their contact information. The first place to begin is by talking to your church's missions committee or elder board. Find out if they recommend any particular mission agencies or if they can help you contact the missionaries that the church supports. If this is a dead end, talk to people who you know have gone and get their input. If you have a campus minister, he or she would be an incredible resource in your search. If by now you do not have a healthy list of choices, go to the Internet. You can start at The Traveling Team's website

([www.thetravelingteam.org](http://www.thetravelingteam.org)) and go to the Links page. There you will have the option to click on “mission agencies.” The list you will find is made up of agencies that we have spent a good deal of time researching and feel absolutely comfortable endorsing. It is not exhaustive by any means, but it is a good starting point (this list is also found in Appendix D). Now you should have several agencies and a way to contact each of them. Your next step is to gather the right information on which to make your decision. Being a good question asker is an important part of the process. Here are a few to start with:

- How do they define short term? Long term?
- How will you be funded? Do they have a faith-based policy?
- Will they train you in raising support?
- Do they give an orientation and a debriefing?
- How long have they been a mission agency?
- Do they focus on one specific group, region or religion?
- What is the deadline for the application to be in?
- Will you be on a team or will they send you by yourself?
- Do you need to be debt free in order to go or do they allow debt?
- Does their doctrine line up with yours? (ie. Their stance on spiritual gifts.)
- Can they send some print materials on their agency and on their trip opportunities?

There are many other questions that you will remember along the way. Rob Antonucci, former missionary to the Muslim world, has thought through some important things to check into when trying to find the right mission agency:

1. Check out their promotional literature and brochures. Remember this type of literature is only introductory; you need to ask further questions. Listen to their catch phrases and how they define them for example: church-planting, unreached, strategic, teams.
2. Are they working among the Unreached? What does this mean when used by an agency? When they say there are no churches do they mean of their denomination? Does unreached mean they work among those who are non-believers or that they work among those who don't go to the local church? Many are surprised when they get to their unreached area and find many workers there doing ministry among a throng of churches.
- 3.\* Are they really an "International" mission agency? Do they welcome people who are non-North Americans to join? Are nationals or natives equal partners in leadership, planning, and ministry? How does the agency involve local leadership in the church? Does the mission agency believe in closure, that is, finishing their work and moving to new areas?
4. How does the mission agency work with the local churches and the other mission agencies? How much are they involved in building the kingdom of God versus their own denominational or mission agency churches?

5.\* What are some of their statistics? What is the source of information? Is it verifiable? After a mistruth is repeated so many times it tends to become accepted as fact. Use caution, some statistics are hypothetical and are designed for high impact only.

6.\* Do they use glory stories? All mission agencies are guilty of some misuse of stories of incredible workings of God in a place. Example: "1,000 people converted in one day in country X." Look beneath the surface, get past the headlines, and look for details. Remember that glory stories alone don't necessarily give an accurate picture of what life is like in a particular ministry.

7.\* How much of an administration fee does a mission take out of the donations for a missionary? Some agencies take less but offer fewer services. Some take a lot and offer lots of good services for their portion of the donation. Be aware that if you go with the cheapest mission agency you may not get some valuable services you will appreciate down the road with another agency even if you would have to raise more support.

8.\* How much of an average missionary's time is spent in ministry versus mission bureaucracy and paperwork? Look closely at the accountability structures. Are missionaries allowed to be completely independent? Are they kept accountable to goals or at least a plan?

9. How willing is an agency to work with your local church? Is your church going to take an active part in the ministry?

*\*These subjects may be more appropriate for someone looking to go long-term and are not necessarily of interest to the short-term missionary.*

### *In Closing...*

I once knew a student who had planned a 2-week trip to Africa. He was pretty excited about it until I told him about an opportunity to work on the coast of North Africa, reaching the youth who travel there to surf. Come to find out this student was a pro-surfer! He lit up at the idea of using his love for surfing to reach the lost, but he had already committed himself to Africa. I have no doubt that his time in Africa was invaluable and life-changing, but how much more might he have enjoyed serving the Lord through his love for surfing?

Finding the right agency will play a significant role in the overall mission trip experience. Not only that, but long-term missionaries are born out of short-term missionaries and, many times, the agency used for the short-term is the agency used to go long-term. There are plenty of agencies to choose from, know them and mobilize strategically to them.