

**Lessons from the Sapling:**  
**Review of Quantitative Research on Short-term Missions,**

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DRAFT

## **Introduction**

To what extent do short-term missions (STMs) bring about lasting positive change in participants? Conventional wisdom, repeated in Christian magazines and from many pulpits on Sunday mornings has it that a short-term mission trips will create lasting change in the lives of both those who “receive” the trip and also in the short-term “missionaries.” Eyes will be opened, hearts will be transformed and lives will be changed forever. An estimated 1.5 million people a year (Priest 2006) are investing billions of dollars on STM trips, based on this perception. This truism is seldom questioned or challenged.

My recent study (Ver Beek, 2006-summarized below) of nearly 200 North Americans who came to Honduras after Hurricane Mitch to build houses found that these STMs trips had resulted in very little lasting positive change in either the lives of the North American or the Hondurans. As a result, I was curious if my study was an exception or if it was supported by other research. My review of STM research found thirteen quantitative studies of STM which used some sort of independent measure to corroborate the changes in the participants’ lives.

The review of these studies below demonstrates that eleven of the thirteen studies found little or no significant positive impact from the STM trip in the lives of participants. And despite the fact that the principal beneficiary of these trips is to be the “recipients” of the STM—of the fourteen studies, only mine looked at the impact of the trip on the recipient churches and communities. Given the millions of missionaries and the billions being spent—these results are quite disconcerting. However, a review of these studies demonstrates that while short-term missions, as currently practiced, may seldom result in lasting positive change—the experience *can* be structured to become a catalyst for such change. My own research and others’ demonstrates that lasting positive change is possible, but it will require that the participants are held accountable and encouraged to translate their good intentions into long-lasting actions.

## **My research on short-term missions with CIDO**

My recent study (Ver Beek, 2006) sought to explore the long-term impact of short-term missions on both the communities the groups serve as well as on the short-termers themselves—do they pray more, study more, or give more? The results of the study took me and many others by surprise.

## *Background*

In October 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras, leaving more than 5,000 dead and 1.5 million homeless or displaced. Hurricane Mitch also created tremendous sympathy among North Americans. The Christian International Development Organization (CIDO) raised over \$2 million for reconstruction in Honduras, most of it used to build 1,082 new homes. CIDO channeled the majority of these funds through their partners in Honduras—Christian development organizations that normally receive CIDO funding for programs in areas such as health and agriculture. Most of the homes were built in regions where these organizations already worked and for people with whom they already had a relationship. Nearly all of the recipients were required to help build their own homes and pay back part or all of the home's cost. CIDO also had 31 STM teams (26 from Canada and 5 from the United States) assist in building homes. Each team spent an average of \$30,000 in airfare, lodging and local expenses. While in Honduras, each team built one house which cost approximately \$2000. These work teams were coordinated by CIDO and CIDO partners in Honduras.

### *Impact of STMs on Hondurans*

Nearly all of the studies of STMs examine only the North American participants, despite the fact that local participants are the intended beneficiaries. This study presented us with uniquely advantageous circumstances in that we were able to compare two groups of new homeowners: those whose homes had been built by STM groups and those whose homes had been built by Honduran Christian development. By comparing these two groups, we could isolate the effect that a STM group's presence (or absence) had on Honduran families and communities. To collect data on both groups, we sent out a Honduran social worker as well as a North American social worker fluent in Spanish to visit six regions in Honduras. They interviewed the fifteen CIDO partner employees (all Honduran) and 78 beneficiaries, about half of whom lived in homes built by STM groups and half in homes built by local Christian organizations. These interviews were taped and then reviewed and summarized by both researchers. We tried to determine how having the home built by an STM group vs, by local builders had impacted the beneficiaries' views of their homes, their relationships to their neighbors, their faith, etc. These interviews resulted in three principal conclusions:

1) *The North American work teams seemed to have no greater impact on the communities than the Honduran Christian organizations—either positive or negative.* When asked about sense of ownership of the new homes, spiritual life, loan repayment, motivation to participate in community projects, and other factors, neither beneficiaries nor development organizations could identify any noteworthy difference between families whose homes were built by STM groups and those whose homes were built otherwise. So while it seemed to make little difference who built the house, the houses built by locals only cost \$2000, while the groups invested over \$30,000 to build the same house.

2) *The work of Honduran agencies has substantial, lasting impact.* While the study did not find a significant difference in impact on the new homeowners based on who built their homes; the

strategies used by the Honduran agencies for training, construction, loan repayment, and follow-up did have a lasting impact on the self-concept and motivation of Honduran individuals and on the unity of Honduran communities. The factors which appeared to have the most positive impact were (a) following through on a clearly defined strategy, (b) accompanying the construction process with a training program, and (c) managing funds and resources involved in construction and loan repayment transparently. Doing these three activities well, made families (a) more grateful for their homes, (b) feel more ownership of their homes, (c) more motivated to participate in other community projects, and (d) more likely to pay off their loans on time. So while the one week with the STM group did not result in lasting positive change, the continuing work of the local Christian NGO did make a significant lasting difference.

3) *Nearly all Hondurans surveyed gave reasons why it was good for STM groups to come to Honduras, but in the end they believed that rather than using up resources on plane tickets, food, and lodging, North Americans could better spend their money on building more homes.* Hondurans made it clear they valued the relationships built and the changes brought about in the STM participants. Hondurans also hoped these participants would become more committed supporters. But in the end, when faced with the great need for housing around them and the shortage of construction work for their neighbors, they believed sending money to build more houses would be the greater good than spending so much on airfare, lodging and food.

#### *Impact of STMs on North Americans*

All 162 participants in the short-term missions project in Honduras were sent a survey and 127 responded (a 78% response rate). They were asked to rate how they had changed their everyday actions such as the amount of time they spent in prayer, time spent volunteering, level of financial giving, and interest in poor countries as a result of their work in Honduras. On average, about 16% reported a significant positive impact and about 45% a slight positive impact, and the other 40% no change. These findings are very similar to most of the studies based on participants' self-perception.

However, we also triangulated these results with the giving records of CIDO, the organization which had sponsored their trip. In the survey about 60% of the respondents (63 individuals) claimed that their level of donations to CIDO had increased significantly or somewhat. We then asked CIDO for the giving records for the year before the respondents went to Honduras and for two years after. According to CIDO giving records, 75% of them had not sent a single direct donation to CIDO after their trip, the total giving from the participants went up only 6%, from \$31 to \$33 per year among all participants, and from \$169 to \$179 per year among those who donated. Since it was possible that individuals were not sending direct donations to CIDO but were giving through their church's regular offerings for CIDO, we also looked at the church's giving for the year before and two years after the Honduras trips. CIDO's records showed that the yearly giving average for the 17 churches that sent groups to Honduras went up by about 1% (\$20,427 to \$20,635). 6 of the 17 churches increased giving after their trips, while 11 decreased

giving. These results are certainly less than would have been predicted given the respondents' answers to the questionnaire and also were definitely smaller than CIDO would have hoped for, given the resources it invested in these trips.

It appears that the participant's perceived/reported changes in giving after their experience in Honduras, were much higher than their actual changes/actions. Obviously this calls into question the respondent's other answers—if they perceived their change in giving as much more positive than it actually was—were their perceptions of their increases in volunteering, prayer and interest in Third World issues also exaggerated? And finally, if the respondents in *this* survey perceived their changes as more positive than they actually were—did this mean that many of the other studies of short-term missions which reported very positive lasting change in participants were also exaggerated? I was curious. Were my findings just a fluke? I decided to look at other studies.

## **Review of Quantitative Studies of Short-term missions**

Nearly all quantitative studies of short-term missions have been done since 1990. We were able to find only 44 quantitative studies, many of questionable quality. Of these studies, only thirteen applied at least one of the following basic research procedures for measuring change in a population: a pre and post-test of standardized questions, a post-test with a control group, or triangulation of the respondent's answers with secondary data sources. I will review here the results of these 13 studies.

### **No significant positive change in participants**

Eleven of the thirteen studies, which fit the criteria for this literature review, found little or no change in short-term mission trip participants. I will begin by summarizing the results of the studies which found little or no significant change and which applied a pre-test/post-test format of standardized surveys.

#### *Pre and Post-test without Control*

##### **Wilson (1999)**

Wilson (1999) surveyed 27 youth who went on a nine day mission trip to Mexico before and after their trip and 45 days later using the *Faith Maturity Scale*. Wilson found no significant changes in the scale as a whole. He did find significant changes in three out of the 41 questions including self-perception of: time spent reading Bible, giving time and money to help others, concern about poverty in US and in world. Wilson did not apply the survey to a control group.

### **Kirby (1995)**

Kirby (1999) was the researcher and also the leader of two evangelism-oriented STMs in Romania in May 1994. All participants—62 Americans in first group and 44 in second (there were also nationals participating, but they were not surveyed) were given pre-trip survey testing a eight factors including: knowledge of and attitude towards missions, self-reported level of giving and time spent in private prayer. The same questions were asked three months after their return by mail or telephone.

Participants' self-reported change in all eight factors was very positive. For example nearly all participants stated that the amount of time they spent in prayer had increased after the trip. However, before and after their STM trip they were also asked to estimate rates for each of the eight factors—for example before and after the trip they estimated how much time they actually spent in private prayer. So while their perception was that they had increased in all eight factors, the changes in their actions (also self-reported) was very minimal—2 items increased, 5 stayed the same and 1 decreased. They reported an increase in private prayer and understanding of missionaries' problems. But their involvement in the promotion of missions, communal prayer, general knowledge of missions, sense of vocation as missionary and their financial giving stayed the same (although 36% perceived they were giving more or significantly more) and their overall attitude toward mission was more negative. The survey was not given to a control group and the use of phone interviews to increase response rate most likely increased the self-reported change (see footnote 6).

#### *Pre and Post-test with Control*

### **Beers (1999)**

Beers (1999) studied 171 students from Taylor University—72 who participated in one-month school-sponsored “study abroad missions” (SAM) during their January term compared to 99 who stayed on campus during the same time (a non-matched control group). Both groups were given the *Faith Maturity Scale*, and the *Growth in Mature Faith Index (GMFI)*. No significant differences emerged between pre-trip and post-trip scores on either faith scales or between the two groups, but there were significant changes in seven of fifty-five specific questions. “The lack of a statistically significant increase in the SAM students' GMFI [Growth in Mature Faith Index] was surprising to the researcher” (p. 122).

### **Blezien (2004)**

Blezien (2004) attempted to answer the question, “to what extent, if any, is the cross-cultural sensitivity of undergraduate college students influenced by participation in summer international short-term mission experiences?”

The quantitative portion of the research involved pretests and posttests of 159 students from five different Christian colleges that are members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. The instrument utilized in this portion of the study was the entire Quick Discrimination Index (QDI) (Ponterotto & Bukard, 1995; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1999) and a portion of the Crown-Mueller (1960) Social Desirability Scale. A non-matched control group of 151 students also completed the pretest and posttest (p. ii).

The pre-test was given approximately one month before their STM trip and the post-test was applied approximately 6 weeks after their return. Blezein concluded that “no statistically significant difference was found between the pretest and posttest scores of the students who traveled overseas for summer short-term mission projects” (p.110). In fact, the Attitudes Toward Women’s Equity scores of the QDI test actually decreased for the summer short-term mission participants.

### **Tuttle (1998)**

Tuttle (1998) carried out a study of 131 students at four Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities schools. The Belief and Commitment Scale (BCS) and the Faith Maturity Scale were administered to 64 test participants both one month before and several weeks after they went on short-term mission trips, and also to 67 non-matched control participants. 20 students who had been on at least one STM were also interviewed. There was no significant change in either of the scales—either within the short-term mission group or between groups. “The change scores of only one BCS item out of 35 showed significant difference (p. 236).” This item was to what extent the respondent was moved by the beauty of creation.

### **Manitsas, (2000)**

Manitsas, (2000) administered the *Spiritual Well-Being Scale* (Paloutzian, 1983; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982), the *Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition* (Fitts and Warren, 1996), and a survey of his own devising with questions about the STM experience and using the Likert-Scale, to 25 members of a Baptist Church who went on a mission trip to Mexico. The test was administered three times (pre-trip, post-trip, six months after trip) to three groups: seven who had previous experience in STM, seven who were going on a trip for the first time and 11 who served as a non-matched control.

Manitsas’ found that,

comparison between the STM groups and the control group did not show significant difference on Spiritual Well-Being or Self-Concept scales; in the Likert-Scale questions and an-

ecdotal responses, however, STM participants reported feeling closer to God, being more committed to Christian service, and more likely to participate in another STM than they had been previously.

The author also notes that “except for being more likely to participate in a future short-term mission trip, these gains [feeling closer to God and being more committed to Christian service] were not sustained through a six month follow-up.” (p. 38)

### *Triangulated Studies*

In addition to my study (Ver Beek, 2006) there were 4 other studies which compared short-term missions participants perceived changed with an external (triangulated) data source, all of which did not find any significant lasting change in participants.

### **Purvis (1993)**

Purvis (1993) surveyed 79 short-term volunteers from the 38 churches of the Caldwell/Lyon Baptist Association (sub-group of the Kentucky Baptist Convention) who had gone on short-term mission trips to Brazil and Kenya. 68 participants responded to a post-trip survey and 24 were interviewed before, immediately following and six months after returning from their trip. These volunteers reported that they had “experienced a positive impact in mission giving, mission knowledge, attitude towards career missionary service, and view of future short-term service (p. i).” In fact, a local pastor stated that “personal mission giving has virtually exploded.” (p. 36) In part due to the growth in this partnership, the Kentucky Baptist Convention hired a full-time staff person in 1985 to coordinate the trips, produce a monthly newsletter and recruit and supervise volunteers.

While volunteers reported a positive impact of the trip on various areas of the spiritual life, Purvis found no relationship between the number of trips and the reported positive changes—which appears to mean that participating in more STM trips would not result in greater amounts of giving, prayer, etc... Secondly, 76% of respondents claimed that their missions giving had either increased greatly or somewhat. He then triangulated these answers with 13 years of mission’s giving records from these 38 churches and reported that their giving had increased by 66.8% from 1981 until 1992. However, Purvis did not adjust for inflation. After adjusting for inflation, mission giving increased only 7% over 11 years or 0.7% a year (see my calculations in Appendix 1). In addition, 89% of the participants were given subsidies amounting to up to half the cost of their trip by the Kentucky Baptist Convention, funds which came out of this same mission’s fund—so the total amount given to long-term missionaries would have gone down over these years.

Finally Purvis found that

Surprisingly, [growth in] resident membership showed a low correlation (.40) to partnership missions [short-term] volunteers. After considering the matter, one realizes that cross-cultural partnerships take place outside the “church field.” So, little direct impact on resident membership results in the sending church from partnership missions experiences. (p.166)

In summary, despite the fact that this short-term missions effort enlisted a full-time staff person to promote the work, produced a monthly newsletter and represented a twelve-year partnership between the churches in Kentucky and the churches in Kenya and Brazil--my re-analysis of Purvis' data found that while 76% of the short-term missions participants believed that the impact of the trip had significantly impacted their giving, this was not the case. In addition, increasing participation in STMs did not result in greater church growth in the US. And finally the funding received by overseas missionaries actually decreased during this period because mission fund income was used to cover airfare for short-term groups.

### **Priest (2006)**

Priest (2006) presents the results of three different surveys which examine the impact of short-term missions on six different issues. One of the surveys found three significant positive changes in the 169 High School students who took a pre and post test surrounding a one-week trip to Tijuana. After their week in Mexico the students had a significant a) increase in interest in serving as a career missionary b) improvement in their perception of Mexicans and c) decrease in ethnocentrism. However, Priest cites his own survey to question this decrease in ethnocentrism and I would argue it calls into question the first two results as well.

However, at the beginning of the trip, when we explored the relation of ethnocentrism to how many STM trips they had been on previously, STM participants did not score lower on ethnocentrism. These latter results were similar to our results with M. Div. seminary students using a 9-item measure of ethnocentrism, with ethnocentrism scores no lower for those with STM experience abroad. One possible interpretation of the above results is that STM trips tend to produce temporary changes only. On the other hand, there may be variability in outcomes due to other factors.

Priest goes on to argue that proper orientation and training during the event may account for these changes where other STM trips fail. I would argue then that all three of the changes are most likely the result of a temporary bump resulting from the trip and the survey needed to be reapplied a few weeks or months after the trip to determine if any of those three changes would have remained significant.

Priest also presents the results of two other surveys, one of 120 seminary students and the other of a mixed group of 565 Sunday-school participants, college undergrads and seminary students. In these studies Priest was exploring whether or not there was a correlation between the number of STM trips and changes in a) increase in giving to missions b) levels of materialistic tendencies and c) the number of interethnic relationships at home. In neither of the two studies did Priest find that people who had participated in more short-term mission trips gave more money to missions, were less materialistic nor had more interethnic friendships.

### **Significant Positive change in participants**

Two of the thirteen studies showed significant positive change in the short-term missions participants. Both of the studies applied pre and post-test surveys.

### **Hopkins (2000)**

Hopkins (2000) surveyed 64 George Fox University students who participated in one of 5 week-long service/mission trips in the Northwest United States and a non-matched control group of 36 students in a general psychology class took Starrett's *Global Social Responsibility Inventory*. Hopkins applied a pretest, posttest and a follow-up test 4 weeks later.

[Even] when pretest social responsibility scores are controlled, the service ministry trip participants continue to differ from the members of the control group in social responsibility scores at the posttest.

Students who participated in the mission trips demonstrated stronger sense of social responsibility than did a control group immediately after trip, and this effect persisted four weeks later. However, contrary to Hopkin's hypothesis, increased opportunity to interact with marginal populations did not result in greater increases in social responsibility.

### **Jones (1998)**

Jones (1998) surveyed 852 US middle and high school students who participated in week-long, summer short-term missions projects in "high-need" communities in the United States. In the mornings the young people repaired homes and in the afternoons they helped with local inner-city ministries. Jones applied the *Faith Maturity Scale* and the *Multidimensional Self Concept Scale* on the first day and the last day of their week-long missions project and found that all groups had significant increases in both scales. Jones then analyzed the impact on the subgroups: junior and senior high, and males and females. Each of these groups also showed statistically sig-

nificant increases in both scales. Jones did not apply the surveys to a control group and did not reapply either of the scales after a period of time to determine if the increases were lasting.

## **Analysis and Future Research**

*Why such difference between qualitative and quantitative results?*

It is very curious that every qualitative study I have found concluded that there are significant positive changes in the participants in short-term missions. Yet the quantitative studies reviewed above are heavily slanted toward no significant change. There are at least two possible explanations: 1) the participants may be significantly changed but the tests used may not be effective in measuring that change or 2) the self-perception of the change was much greater than the actual changes in their lives. While more research is necessary to answer this question, claiming that these tests are failing to capture real change seems less likely given that the fourteen studies above use a wide variety of survey measures which have accurately detected change in many other settings. One further piece of convincing evidence is that while short-term missions are often promoted as increasing interest in long-term missions, despite the skyrocketing number of STM participants in the last twenty years, the number of long-term missionaries has remained stagnant at about 40,000. As a result, I would argue that participants did have a very positive experience and intended that the experience would translate into action—but most often it did not. But when questioned, their positive view of the experience and their intention to make changes in their lives colored their answers. I would call for more studies which used verifiable secondary sources—giving or volunteering records, membership in voluntary groups, career choices, etc... as well as comparing the participants to a *well-matched* control group.

*Why are results of even the quantitative studies reviewed still mixed?*

It is also interesting that the findings in the studies above which fit my criteria were not unanimous. While the vast majority found very little or no significant change, two of the fourteen studies did find significant change. What can explain that?

I would like to take a closer look at the experiences surveyed in this research, and I would invite others to do likewise. The studies which found significant positive change should be replicated, to see if the findings are consistent. If they are, then the experiences themselves need to be examined more closely. There may well be something extraordinary in certain projects that do result in lasting positive change--certain programs components, structures or leaders who enable others to overcome the human tendency to resist change and to not follow through on good intentions. These components may or may not be replicable, but examining what is working will likely help us learn how to design short-term missions experiences that bring about lasting positive change.

### *Why are there not more studies of the recipients of STM?*

It is very distressing that only two of 44 STM studies to date include data on those who receive STM trips. While this trend is beginning to change, we need more high quality research regarding the lasting impact of STM on the receiving communities. One of the challenges in this research is to avoid the assumption that the communities have no options regarding how their needs can be met. For example, we should not be asking, would you rather a STM group came and built you a water system or would you rather keep drinking dirty water? But rather we need to consider together what would be the “best” way to build a new water system—the method which results in the most positive change for all involved—privileging marginal populations. Another challenge is how to carry out more systematic and “objective” research in communities unaccustomed to surveys or in places where literacy levels are low. I am confident that both of these obstacles will be overcome as researchers begin to pay more attention to the recipients of STM.

### *Hard to change people—the sapling*

Before beginning my own study I believed that the North Americans who went on short-term mission were somewhat fragile/vulnerable—that is to say, a one-week experience in Honduras, Kenya or Thailand could quite easily “shake-up their world” and result in lasting changes in areas such as social action, prayer or financial giving. This hypothesis is common among proponents of short-term missions.

I now question this belief. Rather than believing North Americans (or Hondurans, Kenyans or Thais) are so easily changed, I wonder if they do not more closely resemble young saplings, which can be bent and even held in one place for a week or more, but once let loose quite quickly go back to their original position. Those saplings need to be held in place for a much longer period of time for the change in growth to become permanent.

While my original assumptions seemed plausible, the new perspective seems much more logical. We all know that making changes in our lives is difficult, and that exciting experiences and good intentions often do not translate into lasting change. This perspective would have predicted that the majority of the North Americans who go to Honduras or Kenya or Thailand for a few weeks, upon returning to their jobs, families, mortgage payments, etc., would not follow through on their good intentions to significantly change their lives.

This new perspective contradicts the conventional wisdom and much of the non-quantitative research that has been done on short-term missions. However, both my own research and the majority of the studies reviewed above support this new perspective. It is very difficult to bring about lasting positive changes in our own, or our neighbors’ lives.

*What will bring lasting positive change?*

So if short-term missions as they are currently being practiced are not resulting in lasting positive change in participants what would? Many of our everyday experiences and lots of research, including my own, have shown that two *factors* are key in helping people bring about lasting positive change in their lives. I will call these two factors accountability and encouragement.

I believe all of us have had experiences which result in decisions to change our lifestyles, actions or attitudes. We step on the scale and then commit to exercise three times a week. Or we go on a retreat and decide to pray everyday or give sacrificially to a cause we care about—but as time goes by our resolve dissolves. But most of us have also set goals like these with the difference that friends, colleagues or family hold us accountable and encourage us—knocking on the door to take us jogging or meeting weekly to talk about our prayer lives or our giving practices—and as a result we are more successful in keeping those goals. Accountability and encouragement help us meet our goals.

The importance of accountability is very well documented by research. Over the last 35 years, Locke and Latham's (2002) goal-setting theory has been repeatedly tested and time and again researchers have found that when individuals set goals and regularly get feedback (accountability) regarding their progress, they are much more likely to achieve those goals. Locke and Latham's theory provides several other interesting results to consider. Individuals are more motivated and will work harder to achieve their goals if: a) their goals are made public b) if the goals are specific (not just do your best) c) if the goals are more demanding as long as it is within the individual's capability (most people have little motivation to achieve simple goals). In addition, it matters little if the individual sets their own goal or if the goal is set for them, as long as they accept and commit to the logic and importance of the goal. In summary, goal-setting theory would argue, that short-term missions participants are much more likely to successfully experience lasting positive change in their lives if they set specific, public, demanding goals and then are regularly held accountable for their progress.

The importance of encouragement or social support is equally well documented in helping people accomplish what they would otherwise be unable of doing. Research has shown social support to result in increased test-scores in students, improve college student's ability to adapt, reduce stress in cancer patients, etc ... While social support networks do provide the challenges of accountability and public pressure to achieve outcomes described in goal-theory above, they also provide encouragement, understanding, friendship... in short positive social relationships which provide the motivation to do things we would not do on our own.

My own research supports these points. While my own research did not find lasting positive change in NA participants, it did find lasting positive change in some Honduran communities. It was not the involvement of North American short-term groups that were the cause of these differences, but it was the long-term relationship with the Honduran Christian development organization. When the relationships between the community and the organization were healthy—accountability of all parties to their mutual goals and encouragement and support in meeting

those goals—the communities were motivated, paying their loans, etc... but when there was a lack of clear goals, accountability and encouragement—the communities were complaining, not paying their loans and not working together.

So based on common life experiences as well as substantial amounts of research, including my own, I would argue that in seeking to make lasting change in the participants, the key ingredient is the creation of a structure which will provide accountability and encouragement to the participants before and especially after their experience.

*How can STM contribute to lasting positive change to others and ourselves?*

If it is true that lasting positive change will most likely happen within a long-term relationship of accountability and encouragement, then to contribute to real change in the churches, communities, etc... they visit, STM groups need to do everything possible to ensure that they are partnering with organizations, missionaries, churches, etc... who are involved in excellent, life-changing long-term work with those they serve. While the STM trip may be a catalyst or detractor from the intended changes—it is the long-term excellent relationships are the ones which will most contribute to creating lasting positive change.

Similarly, to create lasting positive change in their own lives, STM groups need a structure of accountability and encouragement in place in order to translate their good intentions into action. Such structures will likely include components such as written goals that they share with the group, accountability pairs, mentors, regular newsletters and meetings where they could do a mixture of things including: share progress on goals, make plans as a group for continuing support or pray and worship together.

## **Conclusions**

The research outlined above demonstrates that STM as they are currently being practiced, are creating very little lasting positive change in the participants—whether North Americans, Hondurans or Kenyans. While the STM trip is often a mountaintop experience for the participants, a few weeks or months later their good intentions to raise money for world missions, work for social justice or deepen their faith have not been translated into actions. If we hope to see those good intentions translated into accomplishments something needs to change.

Our own experiences and extensive research on goal-setting theory and social support networks provide us with strong evidence on how STM should be changed. Participants will be much more likely to change their lives in lasting ways if they set specific, demanding and public goals and then are regularly held accountable and encouraged to put them into practice. Creating a structure which holds *all* STM's participants accountable and encourages them will increase the likelihood that the STM trip will not be just a mountaintop experience but a catalyst which *will* result in dramatic increases in prayer, giving, volunteering, etc...in North Americans, Hondurans and Kenyans.

Further research is required to first of all continue to confirm the very clear trend here which says that STMs as currently practiced does not result in lasting change in the participants. Second, researchers and practitioners need to work together to demonstrate what goal-setting theory has proven in many other fields—that providing participants with accountability and encouragement will make it much more likely that participants will convert their goals and good intentions into lasting positive change. Finally, for this research to actually change practice, it will take practitioners and opinion shapers to recognize the problems with the current STM model and design and implement one which comes closer to meeting the expectations of opening eyes, transforming hearts and changing lives forever.

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## **Appendix 1**

**Reanalysis of Purvis (1993) data on reported giving vs. actual missions giving as a result of a STM experience.**

Taken from Purvis, Tommy G. *Partnership in cross-cultural mission: The impact of Kentucky Baptist short-term, volunteer missions*. dissertation. Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1993.

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	Per capita missions giving from Caldwell/Lyon Baptist Association		inflation rate
	average		
1980	\$ 29.13		
81	\$ 32.93		-0.
82	\$ 35.76		-0.
83	\$ 40.49		-0.
84	\$ 41.29		-0.
85	\$ 42.54		-0.
86	\$ 43.65		-0.
87	\$ 46.29		-0.
88	\$ 47.06		-0.
89	\$ 48.50		-0.
90	\$ 51.62		-0.
91	\$ 53.52		-0.
1992		54.92	-0.

inflation rates calculated with:

DRAFT