



resources for short-term, international mission and immersion trips

DURING IMMERSION

Includes daily reflections for use during the trip



faith. action. results.

tips for reflection during the trip

This document includes 7 sample reflections that can be used in any order during your trip, a 45-minute session about storytelling—and a commissioning service—for the last evening of your trip, preparing participants for their return. Each of the 7 reflections is based on a different theme and is structured to include:

- An opening prayer provided and led by a trip participant
- A daily ritual inspired by the Ignatian model of “Examen,” which invites participants to quietly reflect back through their day
- A reading from Scripture or the Christian tradition
- Questions for discussion
- Closing prayer

Taking time each day for prayer and reflection is an important part of any immersion trip. Yet it can often be a struggle because the group is tired, the schedule precludes it or other activities take priority. In light of these practical obstacles, here are some tips that you may find helpful to ensure that daily reflection becomes an integral part of the experience:

- Let the group know before the trip that reflection each night is an essential—and not optional—part of the experience.
- Before you take your trip, invite each participant to sign up to bring and lead an opening prayer for a particular day. (**Note:** *Opening prayers are not included in the daily reflections and should also be provided and led by trip participants.*)
- Start strong: Begin reflections on the first night of your trip, even if it was only a travel day (consider the “Accompaniment” reflection), to set the tone and begin a routine.
- Work with your host or your trip’s onsite coordinator to ensure that the schedule includes time for reflection at the end of each day. If your group tends to turn in early or is tired by the end of the day, try to fit the reflection in before dinner.
- Be flexible! If time appears to be getting away from you, have reflection on the bus or over dinner. You could ask, simply, “What are you most grateful for?” and “What experience surprised or challenged you and why?”
- Keep in mind that each reflection is intended to take shape within the context of your service or immersion experience and the particular makeup of your group. Try to choose the reflection that best fits your activities for a given day or where your group is emotionally and spiritually. Make changes as necessary to meet the needs of your group.
- If extenuating circumstances prevent reflections on one or two evenings, try to spend time together in the morning before leaving for the day.

SEEKING GOD IN THE POOR

opening prayer

Provided and led by a trip participant.

reflect back on the day silently by first contemplating these questions, and then sharing:

- What specific experience are you grateful for?
- What experience surprised or challenged you, and why?

reading

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta invites us to seek God in everything and everyone all the time: “Seeking the face of God in everything, everyone, all the time, and his hand in every happening; this is what it means to be contemplative in the heart of the world. Seeing and adoring the presence of Jesus, especially in the lowly appearance of bread, and in the distressing disguise of the poor.” (Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories and Prayers*)

Reverend Matt Malone, SJ, the editor of *America: The National Catholic Review*, reflected in a column: “People will tell me, for example: ‘I find God in all things. Like in nature. I find God in the sunset.’ Well, that is a beautiful thought, and I find God there too. The truth though is that just about anybody can find God in a sunset. It’s not that hard. You want hard? Try finding God in an execution, or in cancer, or in AIDS, or war. Now that’s hard. You want to find God in nature? Try finding God in a tsunami or a crop failure. That’s hard.”

Take a moment to silently reflect on the reading and the questions below.

discuss together

- In what people, places and situations have you found it easy to find God today?
- How does Father Malone’s quote resonate with or challenge you? When or where have you found it difficult to find God today? Why?
- What do you think it means to see Jesus in the “distressing disguise of the poor”? Have you experienced this at all on your trip? If so, when?
- Where might you be called to seek God in your everyday life back home?



closing prayer

*God who is always with us,
We pray that we will seek your face in all good things:
in the people we love
in the beauty of creation
in daily surprises that fill us with joy.
And may we seek you even more when you are harder to find—
in the devastation of war or disaster
in broken homes and communities
in the distressing disguise of the poor.
We ask that you make us contemplatives in the heart of the world:
in the heart of all beauty, and in the heart of all suffering. Amen*

ACCOMPANIMENT

opening prayer

Provided and led by a trip participant.

accompaniment

reflect on the day silently by contemplating these questions, and then share responses:

- What specific experience are you grateful for?
- What experience surprised or challenged you, and why?

reading

“As they continued their journey [Jesus] entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.’ The Lord said to her in reply, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.’” (Luke 10:38-42)

Take a moment to silently reflect on the reading and the questions below.

for discussion

- Think of moments today when you felt like you weren't accomplishing anything or felt unable to help. How did you feel in those moments? Why do you think you felt that way?
- Do you feel more comfortable when you are doing something (like building a house) or spending time being with people (like talking or playing)? Why?
- What do you think it means that “Mary has chosen the better part”? What might Jesus' words mean for you on this trip?



closing prayer

*Christ Jesus,
We pray that you help us be present to you
by being present to others
especially those who are most in need.
In moments when we want to feel useful
when we can't accept that being with is doing enough
when we're anxious and worried about many things—
Help us remember
there is only need of one thing:
to love you
as we love each other.
In your name we pray.
Amen*

ENCOUNTER WITH OTHERS

opening prayer

Provided and led by a trip participant.

reflect on the day silently by contemplating these questions, and then share responses:

- What specific experience are you grateful for?
- What experience surprised or challenged you, and why?

reading

“The Church must step outside herself. To go where? To the outskirts of existence, whatever they may be, but she must step out. Jesus tells us: ‘Go into all the world! Go! Preach! Bear witness to the Gospel!’ (cf. Mk 16:15) ... In this ‘stepping out’ it is important to be ready for encounter. For me this word is very important. Encounter with others. Why? Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others ... with our faith we must create a ‘culture of encounter,’ a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak with those who think differently, as well as those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith. They all have something in common with us: they are images of God, they are children of God. Going out to meet everyone, without losing sight of our own position.” (Pope Francis, Address of the Holy Father on the Vigil of Pentecost with Ecclesial Movements, May 18, 2013)

Take a moment to silently reflect on the reading and the questions below.

for discussion

- Who did you encounter today? Share a little bit about them.
- Were you at all hesitant to encounter others? If so, why? Did you overcome this?
- What obstacles to living a culture of encounter did you notice in this community? What obstacles exist in your own home community? Why do you think such obstacles exist?
- What do you think Pope Francis means by building a “culture of encounter”? And what does this have to do with our faith?
- How do you see yourself building a culture of encounter in your own community?



closing prayer

Loving God,

You invite us to go out to all the world—and in so doing to be ready for encounter with others in every moment.

We remember all those who we encountered today and we offer a prayer for them now:

Share the name of someone you encountered today and offer a prayer for him/her.

We offer all these prayers and those we hold in our hearts. In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen

MERCY

mercy

opening prayer

Provided and led by a trip participant.

reflect on the day silently by contemplating these questions, and then share responses:

- What specific experience are you grateful for?
- What experience surprised or challenged you, and why?

reading

"[A scholar of the law] said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?' He answered, 'The one who treated him with mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" (Luke 10:29-37)

Take a moment to silently reflect on the reading and the questions below.

for discussion

- Based on the parable of the Good Samaritan, what do you think mercy means?
- When is it most difficult for you to show mercy in this sense? How might God be calling you to step out of your comfort zone on this trip to show mercy?
- How did you see someone in the community you visited or in your group of travel companions perform a work of mercy today?



closing prayer

Merciful God,

We pray the words of Pope Francis:

"Let us be renewed by God's mercy ... and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish."

(Holy Father Pope Francis, Message for Easter Sunday, 2013)

We pause now in a moment of silence to reflect on how you are inviting us, O Lord, to be agents of your mercy while we're on this trip and beyond.

Pause for a moment of silent prayer.

In your name we pray.

Amen

SOLIDARITY

opening prayer

Provided and led by a trip participant.

solidarity

reflect on the day silently by contemplating these questions, and then share responses:

- What specific experience are you grateful for?
- What experience surprised or challenged you, and why?

reading

“[Solidarity] is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” (Saint John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38)

Take a moment to silently reflect on the reading and the questions below.

for discussion

- How did you experience solidarity today?
- How is being in solidarity with someone different from being the same as them? How can you be in solidarity with people whose experience you will never truly share?
- Review the definition of solidarity you wrote before you left. Rewrite it based on your experience so far. How is your definition different? Why is it different?
- Do you think it's possible to live in solidarity with people you may never meet or may meet once but never see again? If so, how?



closing prayer

Loving God,

Turn my eyes to the other, that I may see each as you see me—with dignity that transcends appearances, circumstances, class, and all earthly status.

Turn my ears to the other, that I may hear their voice as you hear mine—with compassion, presence and tenderness in the midst of suffering.

Turn my mind to the other, that I may come to understand them as you understand me—struggling to find meaning in a world that's fragmented, and your light in a world that's dimmed.

Turn my feet to the other, that I may approach them across the gaps that divide us—gaps too often widened by illusions of family, tribe, creed, race ... even otherness itself.

Turn my hands to the other, that I may serve them as you serve me—with a humble touch that cleanses, that heals, that feeds, and that reassures.

Turn my heart to the other, that I may love them as you love me—steadfast, forgiving, ever merciful, with patience, seeing my joy in theirs.

Turn my life to the other, that I may live in solidarity with them, and thus with you, forever.

Amen

CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

opening prayer

care for God's creation

Provided and led by a trip participant.

reflect on the day silently by contemplating these questions, and then share responses:

- What specific experience are you grateful for?
- What experience surprised or challenged you, and why?

reading

“There was a time when our grandparents were very careful not to throw away any left over food. Consumerism has induced us to be accustomed to excess and to the daily waste of food, whose value, which goes far beyond mere financial parameters, we are no longer able to judge correctly. Let us remember well, however, that whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry! I ask everyone to reflect on the problem of the loss and waste of food, to identify ways and approaches which, by seriously dealing with this problem, convey solidarity and sharing with the underprivileged.” (Pope Francis, General Audience, June 5, 2013)

Take a moment to silently reflect on the reading and the questions below.

for discussion

- How have your eating habits on this trip been different from what you're used to? What have you enjoyed and what has been challenging?
- How are people you've met directly affected by, or dependent on, creation?
- How does this experience invite you to evaluate your own relationship with creation? What created things do you take for granted?



closing prayer

*God of all living things,
On the third day, you brought forth vegetation:
Every plant that bears seed
Every tree that bears fruit.
You saw that it was good
And it pleased you.
Make us worthy of this earth:
in what we sow and what we reap,
in what we plant and what we prune.
So that when that last harvest comes,
When we are called to stand before you,
It may once more be said of this people: "He saw that it was good."
Amen*

JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE

opening prayer

Provided and led by a trip participant.

reflect on the day silently by contemplating these questions, and then share responses:

- What specific experience are you grateful for?
- What experience surprised or challenged you, and why?

reading

“The great need today is for Christians who are active and critical, who don’t accept situations without analyzing them inwardly and deeply. We no longer want masses of people like those who have been trifled with for so long. We want persons like fruitful fig trees, who can say yes to justice and no to injustice and can make use of the precious gift of life, regardless of the circumstances.” (Blessed Oscar Romero, March 9, 1980)

Take a moment to silently reflect on the reading and the questions below.

for discussion

- How do the people you have met “say yes to justice and no to injustice”?
- Blessed Oscar Romero challenges us to ask questions that analyze why situations of injustice are the way they are. What questions do you have about the situations of poverty you’ve glimpsed?
- Which witnesses of faith inspire you to be an active and critical Christian?
- How can you say “no” to injustice within your own community?



closing prayer

*Christ Jesus,
We ask that like Blessed Oscar Romero we will not be afraid to risk
all that we have to follow you,
to stand with the poor and oppressed.
May you grant us the same courage you gave Blessed Oscar Romero:
That we will feel what we are afraid to feel
That we will not be overwhelmed by all that needs to be done—
but that we will follow you,
And trust that you will walk with us on our journey of discipleship,
wherever it may lead.
May our walk be one of true solidarity
As Blessed Oscar Romero’s was.
And in life and death
May we bear much fruit.
Amen*

preparing to return: sharing your experience

Carve out time on the last day of your trip (and before your final commissioning prayer) to help participants begin thinking about how they will share their stories once they return.

introduction

- Explain that sometimes it's difficult to process an experience that is so different from our norm that we don't know how to talk about or integrate it into our daily lives.
- Share that part of our task is to figure out how to share this experience with others and make sense of what it means for our own lives.
- Explain that one way to live in solidarity with others is by sharing their stories in a way that honors their dignity.
- Review the "tips for sharing your story" and ask if anyone else has any to add.
- Tips for sharing your story:
 - Pick 1-2 of your favorite stories or encounters from the trip.
 - Don't try to share every detail about your experience. It can be hard for others to fully understand your experience since they were not physically present. Sometimes they may even tune you out.
 - Be descriptive (explain who you met, what you saw, smelled, touched, etc.)
 - Explain why this particular encounter or story is important to you.

Add other tips.

reflection

- Give participants 5-10 minutes to reflect on a powerful moment of their trip and how they might recount it to someone else in 3 minutes or less. Invite them to choose the experience and then think about:
 - What happened: who, what, where, when, how
 - What it meant to them or what they learned from it

activity

- Ask participants to practice sharing their stories with each other.
- Invite them to partner up (you can participate if there is an odd number of people) and to take no more than 3 minutes to share their stories.
- After one person shares a story, the listener will have 30 seconds to repeat what was most compelling or interesting. (The listener should not comment during the story telling.) Have the partners switch roles. Repeat the activity until all participants have shared and listened.

commissioning

materials

Items to create a prayer space: candle, Bible, cloth, flowers, symbols from the community you visited, etc.

opening prayer

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...

A reading from the Gospel of Luke:

“There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham.

The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’

Abraham replied, ‘My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.’

He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.’ He said, ‘Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ Then Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16: 19–31)

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Leader: Take a moment to share a word, phrase or insight from this passage after the experience of this week. What does it mean to you now?

Allow participants to share responses.

Leader: The Lazarus story reminds us that Lazarus was in need of healing—in the form of food and attention—but he was also a healer. His presence alone was healing: It manifested the injustice that existed in society and provided the rich man a lens to reflect on his own contribution to this injustice and to change his life.

This week, we have had the opportunity to encounter people and communities that overflow with grace and giftedness. When we set out to take this trip, we may have thought that we came to help or fix. But the experience of this week helps us recognize what the rich man couldn't: that the poor have much to offer us, and that we, too, are in need of help and healing. We will now reflect on what this reading means for our own lives as we prepare to return home.

Invite each person to consider the questions:

- What gift did you receive from a person or community you visited this week?
- What is one specific way God is calling you to change your life when you return home?

For the first question, invite each person to think of a gesture that symbolizes the gift they received. For example, if someone received the gift of living in the present moment, they might touch their watch. Give people a few moments to think of their gesture and about their answer to the second question (no gesture needed). Then, begin the reflection.

closing prayer

Leader: *Invite all to stand.*

Loving God,

Help us to recognize this trip as the beginning, and not the end, of a journey. We pray that we will carry the names and stories of the people we met and the memories we shared together with us forever and that we will always remember the gifts of this week. We pray in thanksgiving now for the gifts we received.

Invite people to go around and repeat the gift they received and the corresponding gesture.

We ask God to give us courage and grace so we may leave this trip committed to stand with the poor, reach out to the oppressed and embrace those cast aside by society. And so as Christ's disciples, we call upon the saints and holy ones who have gone before us on this path of justice. May they be in solidarity with us today as we prepare for the next stage of our journey.

*To these invocations, we respond: **"presente."** "Presente" has historically been used in Latin America to pray for those who were killed or lost their lives in the pursuit of justice. Today we will say "presente" during a litany of saints and ask the holy men and women who have gone before us to pray for us. We will also say "presente" as we share the names of those we met this week and pray that they will continue to be present in our hearts and minds as we leave this place and return to our home communities.*



St. Lawrence of Rome, who declared the poor, the sick, the widow and the orphan to be the true treasure of the Church, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, who looked upon a world of exploitation and indifference and rejected it, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

St. Damien of Molokai, whose solidarity with the leper ran so deep that he ultimately lived and died as one of them, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

St. Frances Cabrini, who tenderly loved the forgotten immigrant, reaching out as a mother from the slums of New York to the dark mines of Colorado, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

St. Maximilian Kolbe, who protected our Jewish brothers and sisters during World War II and died in a concentration camp so they might live, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, who drove her sisters to comfort and affirm the dignity of those cast aside, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

Dorothy Day, servant of God, who challenged society to reach out to the stranger, to offer the best seat at the table to the poor and broken, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, and those in El Salvador who spoke out against the atrocities visited upon the poor of El Salvador and upon the body of Christ, we call on you in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

And those people who we met this week, whose stories we will carry home with us:

(Allow participants to share the name of someone they met, and invite everyone else to respond, "presente.")

All of us gathered here, who have experienced this trip together, that we will hold each other accountable to all we have seen and heard, we call on each other in solidarity ...

RESPONSE: Presente.

Invite people to offer one another a sign of peace.