

Training – Mission – myfishbites.com

When we did our first mission, God spoke to both myself and another youth worker and close friend, simultaneously. In fact, when I phoned him up to make a suggestion he was amazed as he was about to phone me to say the same thing. What God suggested was a mission taking the young people to Lithuania.

It's one of those things that you don't take too lightly. It's not something you probably do every year but mission – abroad or in the UK, can be a great idea. So what's the point of this? Well, just some ideas, inspirations, help, advice. Please note this is not a complete or definitive list.

Many things will be learned as you go along. We don't know everything. These are just to give you some guidance, from our limited experience.

Open to God

Too many times we hear, 'we can't do that' in churches across the land. My question is why not? Even if your group is 4, you can go on mission – even locally to another church. Unless it is impractical because of no young people or no youth workers, mission can be possible – so consider it.

The Consequences

Have you thought about the consequences of your mission? I don't mean to the group or yourselves, but to the people you are going to 'minister' to and their local community. You see, mission isn't just about the benefits gained to your group, it isn't just about the short-term benefits to those you're ministering to. It's also about the medium and long-term effects on those you're ministering to and their community. For example, raising money to give to a project that simply hands out money to poor communities can create a culture of dependency. So check out the mission organisation, their beliefs, how they work, their commitment to their mission field etc. In our example, invest in a ministry who empowers local people to control their own destiny. Don't be too strict on all this, but give it some consideration.

Where?

There were at least 5 reasons we thought about going on mission to Lithuania:

1. God guided us to do it, we felt the young people needed to 'do something' not just hear about things.

2. Two of our youth workers had already been out to the YWAM Centre in Lithuania the year before and knew the team leaders.

3. There was a dedicated centre.

4. The YWAM base was used to hosting teams

5. There was specific work to be done.

What factors do you think need to be in place before you'd go on mission? Take time out to think about it. For example, when the group went to Lithuania the second year there were different factors that made it perhaps less impacting:

1. Year two there was less of a defined centre and they found this hard. They were stuck in a little village with very little to do and nowhere to go at night, unlike the first year.

2. Some of the group could only stay for a while. This broke up continuity.

3. Two weeks was too long probably.

So just think carefully and prayerfully, God at the centre. That's all we're suggesting!

The Process

Was first God, then us making initial enquiries to see if it were possible, having taken it to a youth workers meeting. In a few weeks we got our answer. Yes. We then made the idea available to the leadership of the church who were supportive but wanted answers to some questions like how many leaders, what would we be doing, what would we be gaining from it and so on. Be prepared to have answers to these questions.

Next stage was booking the times, dates and flights. The leaders who had been there before made these arrangements. If you are making first contact then it's a good idea to get info on what you'll be doing, on the experiences of others and of what will be expected. Cultural awareness is also important.

We then put out the idea of the mission, setting a limit on Year 11s and above (GCSE year). A letter went out to the parents with all the relevant information and forms to complete as per our child protection rules (have you got these in place?!) We quickly gathered numbers and booked flights.

How Long? How many? Who? What are you going to do?

Year 1 we went out for 10 days and this included travel. Year 2 was 2 weeks. Our experience was that 2 weeks was too long and that 8–10 days including travel time is about right. But it's really up to you.

We took around 16 of us on the first mission trip. This included a family of 5 and 2 other official leaders. We also had a good mix of people aged 15–21. Most of the group got on very well. Only 2 people concerned us in any small way.

Who do you take? We made the decision to take only those who were either Christians, or fairly close to God – and people that showed a level of maturity. It depends on the reason of the mission and your group. Some people take 'difficult' young people on mission and see a transforming effect. But be prepared in prayer and in terms of leaders.

In our first year, we worked with young people. We took a group we knew could cope with what turned out to be a fun and lively group of Lithuanians with great character. In year two, they worked more with children and doing practical work. So the group changed accordingly.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch

Appoint someone in the church who will be at home as a point of contact in case of problems while you are on mission. In the information you send out to parents and guardians you need to let them know who this person is – so ask em first! This was important for us one day when we were going away and 2 of our cars crashed causing no serious injuries but 2 written off cars – so beware.

I would highly recommend gathering a prayer team together – to cover you in prayer while you're away and both before & after! Believe.

Preparation for the group

One thing we did was a couple of Lithuanian culture sessions, led by our leaders who'd been to Lithuania. If you haven't got this kind of experience, ask the mission base for this kind of thing. So, what is acceptable, what to beware of, travel info, customs, money and all the practical info necessary and more!

We also did a leaflet with some basic Lithuanian phrases and then practiced this, much to everyone's amusement. There is also a lot of oil in Lithuanian food so we warned about this. As it happened, we found a local supermarket and each night ate

Pringles and Milka chocolate. Every night! Great bonding activity and junk food!!

Ground Rules

Who is going to be in charge of the group. Make sure everyone knows. Lay down rules such as respect the leadership, respect each other. Person X is in charge in case of disagreements etc. Any other rules should be made known. Also to parents / guardians.

Travel Arrangements

Travel arrangements – how are you going to get to where you need to be? We used train to Heathrow, plane to Vilnius (capital of Lithuania) and then coach to Klaipeda, our final destination. Look after each other and make sure you get the right luggage.

Travel Tip – Always take underwear, money & essentials, spare t-shirt in your carry-on luggage as well as in your main luggage bag. Just in case your luggage gets lost or stolen.

Travel Tip – Make 1 or 2 copies of your passport. Have it on hand in case your passport is lost or stolen.

Injections / Immunizations

Just to go to Lithuania, we all had to have a number of immunizations – such as Rabies, Hepatitis A and others. Check up and make sure you get the right jabs. Make sure these are organised well and I mean WELL, in advance of going. This is because you need time between jabs and to make sure it's all OK. There are organisations that advise on injections etc. For example, http://www.e-med.co.uk/travel_clinic.html

Your Church

It is Biblical to be sent by your church as a missionary, apostle or whatever you want to call it! Sometimes for a specific purpose or calling. (See Acts 6.5–7 and Acts Acts 13.1–3). So get the church to support. We all had Lithuanian t-shirts made, wore them to church one Sunday and the church prayed for us. We also ran fund-raising events – like our murder mystery meal where we set fire to one of the sheets – but that's another story – and not compulsory!

Culture Shock

Be prepared for this. I didn't realise how it would affect me and I've travelled a fair bit. The trouble with us English especially is that we are a bit arrogant towards other nations and often a bit shy in eating non-English foods (thankfully this is all

changing!) So be aware and prepare to deal with the inevitable.

1. Initially it's all very interesting and new.

2. Then shock sets in about the new culture you are in. You can end up dissing the country you're in and its people. People complain, want to go home, hate everything, withdraw, get hostile even.

3. Recovery – going through the pain barrier and making the change within yourself to deal with it. This is called growing and needs humility. Accept you have culture shock, try to work through it. Watch how other people cope and react and learn from them. Be positive, pray, share and be open about the struggles. Get to know people. Keep up your strength and try to grow from this new challenge.

Time To Go

With all the arrangements in place it's a case of doing it. Meet together, pray together. Listen to each others worries and re-assure each other. Then it's off, it's team and it's a case of working though together. As you go, meet up each day to pray or at the end of each day. Maybe share what you've learned. make sure you plan in fun time as well. We went to McDonalds, to the beach and even to a posh restaurant! Be clear about expectations. Appreciate that all are different and will bring different skills and gifts. Take mobile phones as well. Make sure you're stocked up on credit, we spent £80 on one phone alone! There are many other words I could say but take the step, trust God and he will provide if you are in his will, doing his work. Expect spiritual attack but don't fear it.

Debrief

When you get back and have been back a week or so, get everyone together to debrief, pray, share memories, lessons from God and look at pictures. If you're like us, you'll have Pringles and Milka on standby ;-)