

Some Important Cultural Considerations

Travel is one of the best ways to learn about the world, and the different people who live in it. By visiting foreign countries we are introduced to ways of life far different from those we are used to. It is an experience which can enlighten and thrill, and it can cause us to look at our own lives from a new perspective.

Unfortunately, tourists often approach a foreign country and a different culture in an insensitive manner. Tourism locations around the world are developed to cater to the desires of those visiting, and often ignore the histories, traditions, cultures and needs of the local people. When traveling to the two-thirds world, this can mean a very cheap and enjoyable vacation for the tourists. For the local people, however, it can mean the destruction of their farmland, the diversion of their water sources, and the degradation of their traditions and religion. The local people receive low paying jobs in hotels and restaurants to replace their former occupations as farmers and merchants. The tourist, at best, "marvels" at local traditions and values. More often they are ignored or perverted, as tourists assert their demands and as local young people emulate tourists' values. The contrast between the enjoyment of the vacationing tourists and the life of the local people is striking.

Through your travel to your sister parish you will be attempting to experience a different culture in a way that is respectful, sensitive, and open to new experiences. The cultural considerations listed below embody the nature of your trip.

Code of Ethics for Travelers

- 1) Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to meet and talk with the local people.
- 2) Be aware of the feelings of other people, thus preventing what might be offensive behavior. Remember this especially with photography.
- 3) Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely hearing and seeing.
- 4) Realize that people in the country you visit often have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own. Not inferior, just different.
- 5) Discover the enrichment that comes from seeing another way of life, rather than looking for the 'beach paradise' of the tourist posters.
- 6) Acquaint yourself with the local customs. Respect local customs; people will be happy to help you.
- 7) Cultivate the habit of asking questions instead of knowing all the answers.
- 8) Remember that you are one of thousands of visiting tourists. Do not expect special privileges.
- 9) If you really want a home away from home, why travel?
- 10) Spend wisely. Remember when shopping that the bargain you obtain is only possible because of the low wages paid to the maker.
- 11) Make no promises to local people unless you are certain you can fulfill them.
- 12) Reflect daily on your experiences; seek to deepen your understanding. "What enriches you may rob or violate others."

Code of Ethics for Travelers, developed by the Christian Conference of Asia

Questions for Group Discussion

1. What are our personal goals for this trip?
2. What fears and concerns do we have?
3. What are some things we hope to happen as a result of our trip?
4. What do we think we might be able to learn from the Haitians?
5. How will we share this experience with our community, friends and family, co-workers, church, etc. when we return home?
6. Should our group have any common objectives for this trip?
7. How will we make decisions if members disagree?
8. What talents do we each personally have that will help us have a meaningful experience?
9. In what ways do we hope to integrate this experience into our lives?
10. Other issues we should be discussing?

Spiritual Preparation for Your Journey

1. Before you leave, ground yourself in the faith experience of your parish community by participating in liturgy and enrichment opportunities.
2. Pray individually, with a team member and the whole team about the visit and reflect on the need to prepare your hearts for the experience.
3. You may want to read books about the lives of saints, martyrs, missionaries and other types of spiritual inspirational books to prepare you for your journey.
4. Try to enter the visit with no assumptions or expectations and with openness to learn from the people. Visit to be filled with their spiritual richness.
5. While visiting prayer and meditation are key to integrating your experiences and to building relationships. Pray with your sister parish parishioners and share prayer in silence.
6. Share liturgy and study the scripture together.
7. Be present to and accepting of the other (instead of rescuing) and allow God to work through you.
8. Assure them you will pray for them when you return home.

Train yourself in patience and flexibility in everyday life. Shape your attitudes. Practice patience and kindness to others at home, work and church. If you practice these things you will be able to do them naturally on your visit.