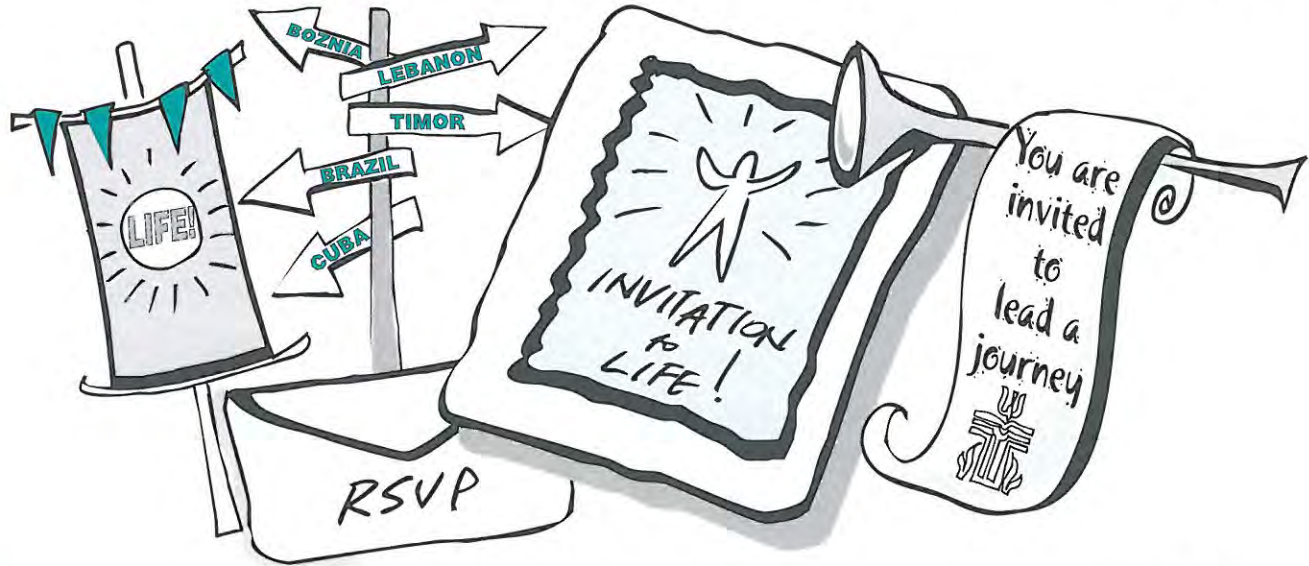


Invitation



■ Invitation

God has extended an invitation, a call to life. God invites us to liveliness. God invites us to share life with others.

■ This is an invitation to live fully the experience of being a trip leader. It is a call to engage not only in the mechanics of trip preparation but also in the guiding of the group. This guidance includes the following elements:

- building community among those who were strangers
- supporting individuals as they encounter new people and places
- examining with participants their assumptions and world views
- offering sacred spaces for reflection
- being a midwife for transformation
- challenging individuals to involvement beyond the trip itself

- encouraging participants to share their experiences in ways that stimulate others to grow in knowledge, commitment, and action in the world

Further, it is a call to allow the experience of leading this trip to be a transformative one for you personally. It is a call to allow yourself to be touched in and through the leadership role by God's creative, comforting, challenging, and holy Spirit.

■ This is an invitation to consider both the leading of the journey and the journey of leadership. As the leader of the trip, you will have certain clear responsibilities that you must meet. As you meet the people on the trip and meet the responsibilities required to guide them in their experience of the outer world, you may encounter issues that give you the opportunity to stretch and grow. Then leading the trip becomes a journey in itself for you. Leading the trip invites you to enter your inner world as you

confront frustrations, temptations, prejudices, exhaustion, and other very human responses to living in community and leading God's people.

■ This is an invitation not only to lead the journey but also to be led on the journey. Others will look to you, as the leader, for information and inspiration. You will hold the schedule and make decisions for revisions along the way. You will provide a context for the day's events and make sure that the number of people with which you start out is the number with which you return.

Participants will follow the leader. Whom will you follow? Who is your leader on this trip? How will you stay attentive to people and places and aware of potential problems? How will you remain ready to celebrate the breakthroughs in people's understanding and able to offer a word of comfort or challenge when and where appropriate? What is the source of your leading? Will you be led by God in the leading you do?

In new situations, or even in familiar ones with a new group of companions, there may be times when you do not know what to do. Then you have the option of either pushing ahead as if you did know, or engaging in prayerful discernment. You have the opportunity to practice (or learn) the spiritual discipline of "unknowing" which keeps the options open to God's voice and leading.

■ This is an invitation to engage "the spirit of matter" and "matters of the spirit" as you travel with the participants. The God of Creation is present in all times and places. Being able to see God in the places and people you visit is an important aspect of your journey. To see God at work in the situations you encounter, and to sense God's wisdom in the voices of people you meet, is to meet the "Spirit" in matter, to see the Holy in material things. To be witnesses to the powers of death and resurrection and to recognize the gospel lived out in daily lives is to engage the Sacred in physical things. This outer journey is paralleled by an inner journey, an opportunity to engage the "matters of spirit" which rise as we respond to what we see, hear, taste, touch, feel.

The inner journey is an opportunity for us to grow in the Spirit of God: in love, in compassion, in commitment to justice, in the exercise of hope and the practice of joy. The inner journey prompts us to examine our own lives for those things which contribute to the war, poverty, hunger, injustice, and oppression which we encounter outwardly. We are given the gift of confronting our own complicity in the way the world works. We are led to examine those internal wars, poverties, hungers, injustices, and oppressions that we perpetrate and/or experience ourselves. Our personal sins must be confessed and our own wounds must be healed as part of the healing of the world. There are abundant

opportunities for spiritual growth to occur in the midst of peacemaking, mission involvement, information gathering, community living, and learning together.

■ This is an invitation to model for participants a travel etiquette that honors those whom you visit. Such a travel ethic respects not only persons but also local culture, customs, resources. You have the opportunity to model a travel experience that is rooted in God and therefore is vulnerable, open, and, as John Calvin said, “teachable.” As a leader of the trip, you have the opportunity to make visible by your example new ways of meeting the world and its people. If you can build a community among the participants, and if you can create a climate in which the travelers become open with and to each other, you also model an openness to the people you encounter on the trip. If you respect persons of diverse experience, opinion, and faith expression within the group and in the people you meet, participants will be invited to do the same with each other and those they meet. If you honor the customs and culture of the people who are your hosts, participants will have the choice to do so as well.

Participants may be less aware of cultural differences and may be less able to respond appropriately to these differences. If you approach each situation, not only with information, but with a willingness to learn more, to change your mind, even to be confused, participants will be affirmed in

doing the same. John Calvin wanted God’s people always to be “teachable.” It is a most difficult thing for us—to be comfortable with not knowing. It is not easy for us to be vulnerable to emerging truth, to wrestle with conflicting information, to suspend judgment, to refrain from expressing our own opinion until we have heard all sides and can see a broader picture.

The trip you are taking is a journey outward and a journey inward. It is an opportunity for seeking justice and experiencing joy. It is an occasion for peacemaking and prayer. It is a time for growing in knowledge and in wisdom. It holds the possibility of engaging in reflection and action.

The 1983 General Assembly Mission Council of the United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) said in its report to the Assembly: “If the Gospel does not drive us to our knees and to the streets, we are not faithful in either aspect of our discipleship.” It is the journey inward as well as the journey outward that leads us to true transformation. The transformation of our selves is always a contribution to the transformation of the world.