



We Come Bearing Gifts...And Baggage

May 29, 2019

Rachel Yates

The international call came out of the blue. “Rev. Smith, I am a pastor of a church in Kampala, Uganda. One of my members attended services at your church last month. She keeps telling us how we must get involved, and I’m calling to let you know that we have decided to help.”

The American pastor vaguely remembered his conversation with the young woman from Uganda, but he did not recall asking for her help. “You are very kind to offer,” responded the American, “but help in what way?” “To complete your building. We understand that it is inadequate for your church and that you are trying to raise money to finish it.”

“Oh, yes, the capital campaign. We are planning to add an education wing and expand the sanctuary. Thank you for offering to help, but we are close to reaching our goal. With the bank loan, we will be set.”

“There is no need to worry about a bank loan,” explained the Ugandan pastor, “because my church is coming to finish the work for you. We arrive in two weeks, and we have already purchased the building materials. This is our gift to you.” The American pastor hesitated, “What a kind gift, but we are not ready to build: we must start the permitting process; we need to hire the contractors; the building materials need to match the architectural plans; and we’ll need to move out of the adjacent space. If your group wishes to visit, we’d be glad to host them to share more about our community and our ministries, but there is no need for you to make the long journey just to work on our building.”

“It is no problem! Forty-five of us are coming, and several have done construction projects like this on our annual mission trips. So there is no need to worry about hiring contractors. Because my church members really want to *do something* on this trip, we’ve decided to make your church building project our priority. We do hope to experience the real America though, so we will be grateful to stay with families in their homes. That will save you the expenses of hotels. One other small matter: our stomachs are sensitive to your American food. We’d prefer Ugandan food during our stay. See you in June!”

On June 15, the Presbytery of Milwaukee is excited to welcome Ellen Sherby, Coordinator for Equipping for Mission Involvement, with the Presbyterian Mission Agency. ***Ellen will lead an interactive [workshop](#) from noon to 4 pm at Wauwatosa Presbyterian Church, on how to design and lead short-term mission trips.*** Whether your congregation wants to travel internationally or across the state, this workshop will guide mission leaders and trip participants in doing faithful and effective mission, rather than toxic charity. [Register online](#) now, so we can reserve your spot and free lunch.



Sometimes we don’t see ourselves as our mission hosts do. I created this story about a mission group from Uganda in the hope of putting a mirror up to our own tendencies of launching ourselves onto host communities. Whether it’s the way in which we prioritize our hosts needs or our “simple” requests to our hosts to accommodate our needs, we can become an unintended burden on the people we think we’ve gone to serve. Ellen will remind us of the deeper theological connections we’re called to make as we join in God’s mission, as well as offer practical pointers and resources for ensuring mission trips are faithful and effective for all involved. A former mission co-worker in Nicaragua, Ellen has seen the good, the bad, and the ugly, and she’s eager to facilitate our discussion around short-term mission trips. I encourage you to attend, to share your own experiences, to plan your next trip, and to celebrate God’s invitation to mission with others.