

Los Embajadores Group Orientation and Meeting Outline

Mtg. 1. - Parent Meeting (to be held after selection of youth, ideally about two months before trip)

Explain and fill out paper work (have notary there for minor permission form).

Briefly explain trip: schedule, work to be done, etc.

Rules, Medical Concerns, Packing information.

Explain importance of fundraising.

Mtg. 2. - Fundraising Letter writing.

Questions from students after last week's parent meeting

Icebreakers / Cultural Orientation Topic

Fundraising letter writing: Introduce the need to have people to hold us accountable, support us with prayer, "invest in us" and ask us about the trip when we return.

Mtg. 3. – The Immigrant Experience / Five Pillars

Icebreaker

Mexico and the Immigrant's experience (Guided Reflection)

Introduce the 5 components of an "Immersion experience" (the 5 S's) and talk about the importance of all the aspects. They are: Social Justice, Spirituality, Solidarity/Community, Simple Lifestyle, and Service.

Mtg. 4. - Border Issues and Simple Lifestyle

Icebreaker

Collect all outstanding forms

Border issues: Show film "Dying to Live" (to order film, see our website. Go to Links: Trip Director Resources)

Simple Lifestyle. What we must give up to go on this trip, what we could give up and for what in return? Think about list and we will decide next week what we will do.

Mtg. 5. - Simple lifestyle and Packing:

Continue last week's discussion of Simple lifestyle.

Packing Skit: Demonstrate what to bring, what not to bring.

Ground Rules for trip, Final Concerns

Discuss details for departure date

RESOURCES follow the meeting outlines regarding Simple Living and there is an outline for a meeting regarding Community, which could be substituted for one of the topics above.

Los Embajadores Meeting 1, “Parent Meeting” (Schedule about two months prior to trip)

1. As parents arrive, have them fill out the “Permission for a Minor to Travel in Mexico” form and have it notarized. Distribute (if not already done) all other official forms: medical information, physical, emergency, etc.
2. Opening Prayer/Welcome
3. **Introduce** Adult team members
4. Explain that students were given “conditional acceptance.” These meetings are a time for discernment, for both students and adult leaders. A student may choose not to go, or they may also be asked not to go. It is important that students attend all meetings.
5. **Overview** of trip, where we stay, etc. (Give itinerary or tell them it will be available later)
 - a. We are guests in Mexico
 - b. We hope to be ambassadors for our experience when we return, to the people at home.
 - c. This is an experience in humility, cultural awareness, community living, simple living, social justice, and spirituality.
6. **Rules:** basic expectations of students:
 - a. Limited phone calls (contact numbers in Mexico are for emergency only). Ideally students will only call while traveling to and from Mexico and not while in Mexico: for reasons of solidarity and in order to be fully present to the experience.
 - b. No one goes anywhere alone; students always have an adult leader present
 - c. Respect for community, new culture, etc.
 - Eat what is given to you, if you cannot, offer it to others in group. Before taking seconds, see if there is any food on another’s plate you can finish first.
 - Appropriate dress (cultural respect issue) pants for church (in Vicente), no revealing or tight clothing, absolutely no tank/tube tops or sleeveless shirts. T-shirts, long (knee-length) shorts, or pants are typical work clothes.
7. **Medical** concerns, Health issues
 - a. **DRINK THE WATER!!** – In the past, medical issues have arisen due to dehydration. Everyone drinks filtered, bottled water that will be provided by Los Embajadores. Be sure to drink lots of it. However, you should not drink the water from the tap – it is not purified.
 - b. Check with your doctor for recommended shots, etc. Hepatitis shots are suggested, but the final decision is up to you and your doctor.
 - c. Sickness can occur (upset stomach) because of the change in food and physical activity. (It is quite common for this to also happen when we return to the States and eat our regular food.)
 - d. If something does happen, there are good clinics and hospitals near our sites, and adequate emergency procedures are in place.
8. **Packing** lists (briefly cover important items. Ask everyone to review list to see if there are questions.)
9. Introduce **Fundraising Plans**

If you do letter writing: Why we write letters, what is expected. Don’t give out the letters yet (do @ Mtg.2)

 - a. We cannot do this alone. We need to ask people to support us with thoughts and prayers, and with funds.
 - b. Expand on the impact of this experience. As Los Embajadores participants, we are hoping to be “Ambassadors” to the people back home when we return, sharing our experience with those who have supported our journey.
 - c. When people support us with funds, they are literally “investing” in our experience, and they will hold us accountable when we return. These will be the people who ask us about our trip and they will want to know what we learned. This is an essential part of bringing this experience home.
 - d. When, on the trip, we write thank you letters to the people who supported us, we are beginning the process of “making sense” of this experience and finding the words to explain what we saw, experienced and did. Writing to another person, especially someone who supported us and is interested in us, forces us to reflect on the experience and clarify our thoughts.
 - e. We expect that every participant write at least 10 letters. For many groups, those who write at least 20 letters almost always have the entire cost of their trip paid for by fundraising.
 - f. Tell participants how much the trip will cost per participant and what their fundraising goal is. See Trip Director’s Manual for other fundraising ideas.
10. Closing prayer

Los Embajadores Meeting 2 – Letter Writing Meeting

Students should bring names and addresses of people to write fundraising letters to for the trip.

1. Prayer
2. Questions from students after last week's parent meeting
3. Icebreaker
4. Brief presentation on a topic of interest regarding Mexico: current economic situation, politics, history of region, etc. OR: Have a former international volunteer (Peace Corps, Jesuit Volunteer, etc) speak about their experience.
5. Fundraising letter writing:
 - a. Introduction (reiterate explanation from last week): need to have people hold us accountable, they will support us with prayer, "invest in us." and ask us about the trip when we return.
 - b. Describe process: Form letter w/ personal note on bottom for each person, put your name on return card, include return envelope and possibly a fuller explanation of the trip (or an article about last year's trip) in each letter.
 - c. Have students write: it helps if leader shares some old letters from previous years.
 - d. Tell them that if they can write at least 20 letters it is likely their entire trip will be paid for.
 - e. Possibly offer donors who give more than a certain amount (100 dollars?) the chance to attend a dinner cooked by the participants during which they share their experience, pictures, etc.

Materials Needed:

Pencils/pens

175 fundraising form letters

175 explanations of program or article sheets

175 reply cards

175 envelopes #10

175 reply envelopes, #9

SAMPLE FUNDRAISING LETTER

Dear

From _____, I will be on an immersion experience working with the people of _____, Mexico, along with 30 other youth and adult leaders from _____. This service-learning experience is part of a program called **Los Embajadores**, which has been organizing trips to Mexico since 1988. While in Mexico, we will be doing construction projects with the local church (*or helping local parents construct a school in a poorer neighborhood of Tijuana*) and also sharing our time and ourselves with families in the area. As Embajadores (Ambassadors) we will be living in solidarity with the people of Mexico and sharing our experiences with our community upon our return.

As you can imagine, a trip like this costs money. I need to raise _____ dollars to pay for this experience. I am sending you this letter to ask if you would be interested in supporting me financially *and prayerfully* for this project. The money will be used to help buy food, rent vans, pay for gas, and buy construction materials and tools. Furthermore, your support will strengthen me during this physically and emotionally demanding experience.

A small or large donation will be gladly accepted. Checks should be made out to (Group's Name) and are tax deductible. If you are able to help out financially, please send your check along with the enclosed card to the address below by _____.

Whether or not you are able to support me financially, I'd appreciate your prayerful support during the trip. Though I am making this journey without you, it is important for me to know there are people back home who support me and who will join me in spirit. I look forward to sharing my experience with you upon my return.

Thank you,

LOS EMBAJADORES

Fund Raising Project – Information for participants

This fundraising project is one of the main sources of funds for the trip. All students attending the trip are expected to participate in this project. This method asks that people support us not just with funds, but also with thoughts and prayers. **In essence, we are inviting them to be a part of our experience.** Though they will not be making the actual trip with us, we will keep them informed of the experience while it is happening, and we **will be sharing what we learned with them when we return.** By incorporating support from our community in order to make this trip happen, we are already becoming ambassadors! Please look at the following "to do" list and put time and effort into this project.

1. Look over the list below and decide who you are going to send letters to. Remember, it never hurts to ask! Write in that **person's name** on the salutation in the letter (Dear _____,)
2. **Write a personal note** on the bottom of the form letter. This personal connection is an essential part of the letter. It should be your reasons for wanting to do this trip, what you hope to get out of it, or why you chose to write this particular person. Remember, this is a **personal** note, so make it personal for each letter. (Don't forget to sign the letter!)
3. Write **your name** on the response card that will be enclosed with your letter.
4. Write the name and address of the person on the outside of the envelope. **Stuff** the envelope with the following: the (personalized) form **letter**, a response **card**, and a return **envelope**.
5. Bring home several extra letters to send to people whom your parents suggest. You should send out 10 letters at a minimum, but you can send as many more than 10 as you like.

SUGGESTED LIST:

- Grandparents
 - Aunts / Uncles
 - Other relatives
 - Your parents' friends
 - Parents of your friends
 - Your place of employment
 - Parish Priest or Youth Minister. (some students have offered to give a short presentation to church members when they return. This is a great way to share what you'll learn.)
 - Parish Altar Society, Knights of Columbus or other Parish organizations
 - Teachers or coaches (but we don't want one teacher to get tons of requests!)
 - Any organizations you are involved in outside of school or church. (Sports teams, civic groups like scouts, clubs, etc.)
- As a courtesy, it is best NOT to send letters to families of students who applied to Los Embajadores, but were not accepted. (if you have questions about who this is, ask your group leader)

Los Embajadores Meeting 3

1. Prayer
2. Introduce any adults who were unable to attend first two meetings.
3. Tell participants all forms must be submitted by the next meeting, no later.
4. Open w/ Icebreaker: (the group needs to get to know each other. Do ice breakers almost every meeting.) “Flattering Adjectives” game. (As fast as possible, give a descriptive adjective for self, continue in a circle, each person needs to repeat the name and adjective of the persons before them.) or “Toilet Paper” (Explain the importance of carrying your own supply of TP on the trip. Pass around a roll of TP and tell everyone to take as much as they will need for the first day. Have adults or planted students start and take a significant amount. After everyone has taken some, go around the circle and each person has to say at least one thing about him or herself for every square of toilet paper that they took.)
5. Mexico and the Immigrants’ experience. First, be sure all people are sitting next to at least one person they do not know well.
6. Imagination Exercise: (the experience of the illegal immigrant is an experience of the loss of all you have, even your name.) *Walk students through this mental experience, adding to the story as needed.* (Give everyone a pen and piece of paper)

- a. *List all the things in your home that make you feel comfortable and safe (aside from people) – and/or list the five things in your room that are most important to you.*
 - b. *You have been told you must leave your home forever. You have 15 minutes to pack, so cross off everything on your list that doesn't fit in a regular backpack. (Give time to do this)*
 - c. *Now, picture the door in your house that you use everyday. You are standing on the outside of that door, and picture yourself closing the door behind you. You are leaving forever and will not return. (Some time)*
 - d. *You find yourself at a border. Any border, but it is illegal for you to cross. So, to try to cross the border you hire a coyote. (Ask if they know what a coyote is and what they will do for you.) You must pay between \$2500 and \$3000, and he demands that you give him your backpack. Hand over your list to the person next to you. Let that person read your list. Then put all the lists in the middle of the group.*
 - e. *You have left your home and what makes you comfortable. You have given away your backpack with the little things that were most important to you. But you still have your name. Say your own name to yourself. What does it mean to you? How is it connected to your identity?*
 - f. *When you finally make it to your destination, you need to find work. So, you find a person to get you fake papers, papers that will allow you to be hired, and those papers come with a new name. You now must give up your given name. You must give it up and assume a new name. Have the person next to you give you a new name. How does it feel to be called by this new name?*
 - g. *You have given up everything you have, all you own, all you possess; even your name. But, you still have one thing left, your story. You have the story of how you came to this new place, and the story of your old home and people you knew. As we go to Mexico, or even here at home, listen carefully to the stories. They are the most precious possession we have. Pay attention to your own story. Try to take the name of "Pilgrim," not Tourist. (Could ask: what do Tourists do? What is a pilgrim; what do pilgrims do? Also, we need for our mindset to be one of "pilgrim," not "evangelist," a seeker of God, not a bringer of God. God is already in Mexico, and God has been there long before us and will remain there long after we leave.)*
 - h. *Turn to a person next to you whom you do not know and share about this experience. What did it feel like? What had the most impact for you?*
7. Cover the components of an "Immersion experience" and talk about the importance of all the aspects. They are: (the 5 S's) Social Justice, Spirituality, Solidarity/Community, Simple Lifestyle, and Service. Each of these is an important part of this immersion trip. Take some time to explain why these are so important.

Possible descriptions of the five components (fuller descriptions can be found at the start of the Trip Director's Manual):

- Service – the work we do will be helpful, and it is nice for us to know that we have made a tangible difference in the community. But this is not the sole purpose of our trip.

- Solidarity/Community will be a challenge for many of us. We will be enriched and supported by the people around us, but we will also be spending a LOT of time together and need to be aware of what others may be going through. Solidarity challenges us to live more like the people we are serving and to work to be in community and in connection with them.
- Simple Lifestyle is about removing things that get in the way of our purpose, just as much it is about finding room in our lives for the things that are the most important: relationships, people, spirituality, etc. **this is often a challenging part of the week for many youth participants. Please be sure to address this component, and discuss how it will apply to your week in Mexico.**
- Spirituality is an important part of this trip. We need a connection to God to understand why we are called to do service, but we also need to understand the difficult issues we will face and why people have to face them. And finally...
- Social Justice is the component that pulls us into the questions *why* and *how*? Why must people live in poverty? Why is their injustice in our world? How can I be a part of changing this world for the better? How can I help bring about greater dignity for the people involved?

Give Homework – select readings from one of the resources listed on our website or in the Resources folder of the Trip Director cd pertaining to one of the 5 components. There are many books and articles available that describe the journey of the migrant and life on the border.

Los Embajadores Meeting 4

1. Opening Prayer
2. Check that all forms are turned in. (Due today)
3. Icebreaker: “Name Game competition” (Need Blanket) 2 teams, each sends up one person to sit facing the blanket (essentially facing each other with the blanket in between). The blanket is pulled up out of the way on the count of 3 and the first person to name the other gets a point for their team. The two players then become the holders and two more people are sent up, etc.).
4. Briefly describe site, living conditions (sleeping rooms, showers, etc.) Check with the Los Embajadores Director if you need further details.
5. Border issues:
 - a. Have a group leader or outside community expert (perhaps someone who works in Hispanic social services, a teacher, or a former long-term international volunteer) give a presentation on NAFTA/Border Labor, immigration, Mexican history, economic/politics in Mexico, or some related issue.
OR: Show “Dying to Live” (listed on the links page of our website) or another video
OR: Discuss homework reading from last week

b. Discuss video or presentation topic

6. Simple Lifestyle (elaborate on this subject, which was introduced at the last meeting)

NOTE: It might be useful to find someone in your community who has been in a volunteer program, such as Holy Cross Associates or the Jesuit Volunteers Corp, to speak about their understanding of Simple Living and how this impacted their own long-term volunteer experience.

- a. Introduce Simple Lifestyle (simple lifestyle is a choice to live with just enough to create a life with dignity, versus living in poverty, which is not a choice)
- b. What are the benefits of living a simple lifestyle? What is “waiting for us” if we live more simply? What “gets in the way” if we do not? What might we miss if we do?
- c. Begin the process of deciding how we will live simply on the Los Embajadores trip. (Check in with LE director if you would like ideas on how simple living applies to week in Mexico.) Write each of these ideas down in the following categories.
 - Brainstorm what we must give up to go on this trip, because of the nature of the trip.
 - Brainstorm what we could give up on the trip, optional things like a/c in the vans, cell phones, personal electronics, eating what is put in front of you in Mexico, junk food on the ride down, etc.
 - Brainstorm, individually for each person, what you simply cannot give up because you will not be able to function without it. (This will vary person to person, have them write it down personally)
- d. Think about list and we will decide/come to agreement next week about how we will live. It is helpful to build this list as a team, then review it at each subsequent meeting and on the way to Mexico so community expectations are clear!

7. Closing

Los Embajadores Meeting 5

1. Opening Prayer
2. **Simple lifestyle** - Continue last week's discussion of Simple lifestyle. What we have to gain, why we might give things up.
 - a. Explanation of "simplicity" or "simple living." Read excerpts from websites that describe simple living and its benefits. Some examples: <http://www.simpleliving.net/main/> and The Simplicity Resource Guide by Linda Breen Pierce www.gallagherpress.com/pierce/whatisvs.htm They offer good overviews of simplifying (see below.)
 - b. Each person writes for him/herself his essential core values and the people or things that we truly need, cherish and value. In other words, that which allows us to live with dignity. Put full list on board.
 - c. Each person writes down things that "get in the way" of these most important things. Realizing that sometimes two good things are getting in the way of each other (i.e. work, providing for family and spending time with family.) Which one usually wins out over the other?
 - d. Realizing and trusting that we have good things to gain by simplifying, we turn our attention to the trip. What must we give up, just being on the trip, (list on board) and what could we possibly give up (list on board)
 - e. Each person writes down what he or she would be willing to give up and what they might gain from it.
 - f. Small groups (4 or 5) discuss how they understand simple living, what they might give up and why (have an adult in each group)
 - g. Large group agreement about how we choose to live simply, with reasons why we would give something up (in other words, what we hope to focus on instead). Use consensus for this exercise. (All should agree to work together toward the final goal.) If one person disagrees, ask, "What would it take for you to agree to this?" and keep working towards consensus. This is also a great exercise in community living – listening to every person equally.
3. **Packing:** Demonstration (skit) by two adults of "how to pack" and "how not to pack." Essentially what to bring and what not to bring, proper use of space, size of acceptable baggage, etc. (This can usually be done in a humorous way.)
4. Safety/Community Issues, Ground rules we all need to abide by
 - a. No one goes anywhere alone
 - b. Drink Water!! (Not tap water, but we must keep hydrated)
 - c. Be aware you will be in an unfamiliar environment. Pay attention to your health status.
 - d. If you have a problem with someone, please talk to him or her, not to others about it.
 - e. We will start and end each day, as well as begin meals, with prayer. Students are asked to help with prayers
 - f. Pay Attention to the Mexican people. They are the reason we are going. Take all opportunities to talk with them.
 - g. Language barriers are hard, but not the end of the world. Take risks and work at it. Don't give up because you don't speak Spanish.
5. Any final questions about the trip?
6. Discuss details for departure date, procedures, etc.
7. Closing prayer.

Resources for Meeting Five

Seeds of Simplicity

Organizing & Educating for Voluntary Simplicity: Tools for Children, Adults & Community

A Program of the Center for Religion, Ethics & Social Policy at Cornell University

Millions of comfortable people around the country are choosing the freedom of having less "stuff" to worry about. Being happier with fewer trappings is easy when it saves you money, benefits the environment, teaches children meaningful values and helps others in need. Best of all, simple living delivers the personal satisfaction that only comes when you decide how much is enough for you. In short, simpler living is not backward living, but forward living. Less time spent on material goods means more time spent with family, friends, children, nature, and unlocking the real passions and values of your life. ***Seeds of Simplicity can help!***

www.gallagherpress.com/pierce/whatisvs.htm

What is Voluntary Simplicity?

by Linda Breen Pierce

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This approach to living calls into question our society's tendency to equate money and material possessions with the *good life*. Adherents to this way of life reject the notion that our life goal should be to amass as much material wealth and prestigious accomplishments as we possibly can. Their lifestyles tend to involve patterns of working less, wanting less and spending less.

This way of life cannot be strictly defined. It means different things to different people. What may be a simple, enriching life for one person could be a life of deprivation and suffering for another. Simplicity can best be achieved by paring your life down to its essentials--those things, activities and relationships you either truly need or genuinely cherish. Simplicity involves unburdening your life, and living more lightly with fewer distractions that interfere with a *high quality* life, as defined uniquely by each individual. You will find people living simply in large cities, rural areas and everything in between.

Some of the simplicity values that are important to the participants of The Pierce Simplicity Study include the following:

- eliminating excess possessions and activities that produce physical and mental clutter, or are incompatible with our highest values,
- limiting consumption of material goods to items that are truly needed or valued, focusing on items that have the least impact on nonrenewable resources, and are durable, functional, and aesthetically pleasing,
- applying ourselves to meaningful, satisfying work that serves as a platform for our unique, creative talents and skills, and which also makes a contribution to the community (whether that work is for pay or as a volunteer),
- living in ways that preserve the earth's resources, such as recycling and pre-cycling (avoiding purchases that are wasteful of the earth's resources), and sharing of material goods,
- developing compassion for poor and disadvantaged people, making financial contributions or volunteering our efforts to help those less fortunate,
- investing time and energy to develop close, rewarding relationships with family and friends,
- experiencing the splendor of natural beauty, feeling the connection between nature and our inner selves and to the spiritual presence we feel when we are quiet in nature,
- exploring our spiritual selves, through meditation, prayer, journal writing, mindfulness, yoga or other spiritual or religious practices,
- developing a deep sense of peace and joy by learning to live in the present and enjoy the everyday wonder of our lives,
- taking good care of our bodies by eating a diet rich in healthy, unprocessed foods, and by exercising regularly, often by walking, bicycling, running, yoga or other activities which enhance our awareness of the body and are non-competitive in nature,
- becoming more self-reliant in our daily needs, such as repairing our possessions and home, or exchanging services with others, such as baby-sitting, hair cutting, and car repairs,
- depending less on the one-car-per-adult form of transportation, focusing on alternative methods such as walking, bicycling and public transportation.

LIVE SIMPLY . . . THAT OTHERS MIGHT SIMPLY LIVE

Sample Lists of Things to give up:

Things we must give up because we are on this trip:

- bed
- showers (hot or everyday)
- abundance of clothes (clean whenever we want them)
- appliances
- personal space, time
- independence

Things we can give up in order to get something better:

- Air Conditioning in vans
- Many changes of clothes
- Junk food, snacks
- Make-up, beauty aids
- Personal choice of food, eating only what we like (instead eat what is in front of you)
- Pillows
- Music
- Electronics
- Cell phones
- “trendy” clothing

OTHER TOPICS TO DISCUSS DURING ORIENTATION MEETINGS

(Could be substituted or added to those above)

COMMUNITY/SOLIDARITY

Introduce the idea of community. We will be traveling to Mexico as a community, which will by necessity be a very close one, as we will be traveling together in just two or three vans, living in cramped quarters, and spending nearly all our time together. Moreover we will be going into a culture that places a tremendous value on community, and this will probably become very apparent to us. Communal celebrations, sharing hospitality, and having very close families and neighborhoods are important parts of Mexican culture.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. What communities are those in the group already a part of? How important are these communities to each of us?
2. Brainstorm on what a community is, what does it mean to be a community? Why do people form communities? What are the benefits of community living? What are the biggest challenges? What do we have to do to form a strong community? When there is conflict in a community, how should it be resolved?
3. Many people say that the sense of community is breaking down in the United States and other 1st World Countries. Do you sense or see this? Why do you think this is the case? /What causes this? (Perhaps have students, between meetings, ask their parents or grandparent about whether their community was closer when they were young, and if so, why?)
4. As North Americans we possess remarkable means of communication: email, beepers, and cell phones among them. Do you believe this technology brings us closer to those around us, or farther apart?
5. We will be traveling to Mexico as a large community of thirty people. In Mexico we will be working within a larger community. What do you think we will need to do to build a community, even if only for a week, with the people of Mexico? What challenges are there in building community with people from a different culture and background? Have you ever encountered these challenges before?

COMMUNITY MISSION STATEMENT EXERCISE

Every strong community is based upon a shared set of values, whether they are passed on from parents to children in a family, or written on paper as a nation's Constitution or an organization's mission statement. Take some time to write your own community's mission statement: who are you as a community? What are you about? How will you live as a community? Perhaps also include a set of community "rules" or a community "Bill of Rights"- what each of you are entitled to as members of a community (for example: respect, support, attention when you speak, etc).

Reflection on the Early Christian Community

Read the description that is given of the early Christian community in Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2: 42-47. Reflect on how as a community you can follow the values of this community.