



Mustard Seed Communities

CARING FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

Mission Volunteer Handbook



Begin Your Journey By Reading A Message from Msgr. Gregory:

For reasons unbeknownst to you and me, God has chosen you to begin this journey. Thank you for answering His call and choosing to humbly serve our children and staff. It is our prayer that God will continue to reveal Himself in the time of your preparation for your trip and of course during your stay in our homes. I thank you for sharing your time, talents and discipleship with us and look forward to meeting you.



Msgr. Gregory Ramkissoon
Founder of Mustard Seed Communities

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Frequently Asked Questions

Who are the children of Mustard Seed Communities?

MSC cares for several hundred children with special needs. A majority of them cannot speak, so you will need to learn to communicate by other means. Some children are mobile and others are confined to a bed or wheelchair. Many have twisted and tiny limbs, but some are VERY mobile and will run up to greet you with a hug. The sooner you reach out to a child, the sooner your heart will begin to open to them. *All of them are made in the image and likeness of God and are a gift to us and to MSC.* If anyone on the team has questions about how to hold a child, if it's okay to move them or help feed them, the caregivers will be more than happy to help. Please just don't be afraid to ask. The caregivers work with the children on a daily basis and will be able to tell you about each specific resident. They know and love the residents and have great insight about each resident.

What projects will my group work on?

Every group will have scheduled time to interact and play with the children and young adults. Interaction with the residents is one of the most fulfilling experiences you will have at Mustard Seed Communities. Each group will also have a work project that may include light construction, painting, farming or landscaping. The Mission Program staff will give you an idea of the project(s) your group will be doing as your trip approaches. While we all like to feel as though we've accomplished something tangible on a mission trip, we ask you to always be open and flexible when it comes to your group's work projects. We will do our best to coordinate a meaningful project that you will feel great about when your week is over. If you have someone on your team with specific skills that you think may be useful to MSC, tell us and we will take that into consideration when planning your projects.

What is life like on a mission trip with MSC?

Every day brings an opportunity to rise early and spend time with the residents whether it is to feed them, play with them, or simply be in their presence. Throughout your trip, you will build community within your team and with the staff and residents of Mustard Seed Communities. Each day is filled with time to reflect, share, and pray. You will also get the opportunity to experience the culture and enjoy a "day out" in the local community. Keep your mind and heart open. That is the best way to ensure that you have a fulfilling mission experience. Be present and willing to learn from the children and those you meet. For a detailed sample of an MSC mission trip schedule, please visit the [Prepare for your trip page](#).

What is expected of an MSC mission volunteer?

We hope that while you're on a mission trip, you will think of the experience as a retreat – you are getting away from the convenience of home, hot showers, electronics and your everyday life so that you can care for the MSC children. Be present for them, the staff and your fellow mission volunteers.

What Should I Bring?

For a detailed list of what to bring, see the packing list on page 5. We recommend that you pack lightly- **plan to live simply for the entire week.** You may be surprised to see what you are able to live without! If each mission volunteer packs their personal items in a carry-on bag, then checked bags can be used for donations. Some airlines charge a fee for checked bags.

Please keep in mind that the needs at Mustard Seed are constantly changing when collecting donations to bring in your luggage. If you have any questions about in kind needs, you can either check with the MSC USA Office or visit our [In Kind Gifts page](#) to view the Wish List for each location. Your group will need to submit an itemized list of all donations and their values to the Mission Program staff (mission.trips@mustardseed.com)

How will we get to our destination?

All travel arrangements from and back to the United States will need to be coordinated by you and your group. Your group will purchase the airline tickets on your own. We recommend that you research flights and purchase your airfare as soon as possible. Once you arrive in country, MSC will meet you at the airport and handle all local travel accommodations, including your day out.

Will there be any out of pocket expenses?

Before and during your trip you will want to have some money to cover small additional expenses such as souvenirs, your day out and other miscellaneous items. We caution missionaries from bringing large amounts of cash. For further clarification on your day out expenses and what you can expect, please be in contact with the Mission Program staff (mission.trips@mustardseed.com)

What safety measures are in place to protect mission volunteers?

The safety and security of our mission volunteers is MSC's first priority. All MSC locations are secured and gated and have security 24 hours a day. As with any international destination, you need to exercise common sense and use caution when outside the MSC facilities. Each mission group is accompanied by an experienced driver and a Mustard Seed Communities mission representative when traveling outside of MSC properties.

The mission representatives, who are employees of MSC, supervise all volunteer activities and stay with the mission group throughout the day and evening. Mustard Seed Communities has been operating mission trips for over twenty years. Our groups are made up of teens, college students and adults and continue to grow every year. Over 1300 mission volunteers participate in mission trips each year.

Does MSC provide insurance for mission volunteers?

To protect our mission volunteers while traveling internationally, MSC has engaged the services of ACE American Insurance Company to provide emergency travel assistance, accident and sickness insurance, medical evaluation security evacuation and repatriation coverage. Download the [insurance ID card and FAQs](#) or go to [Prepare for your Mission Trip](#). This coverage is valid for the days you are traveling and is included in the cost of your trip.

When do you need to pay for the trip?

Fifty per cent of the funds are due four months prior to your departure. Full payment for the trip is due 60 days before you leave. Over 50% of your minimum donation goes directly to caring for the residents. We encourage you to set your fundraising goal high and try to raise more than the required minimum donation. MSC reserves the right to cancel a trip if the final payment is not received.

What happens if we have to cancel?

All deposits and donations are non-refundable. If an individual mission volunteer has collected funds and does not go on the trip, those funds are added to the group funds.

MSC Rules & Guidelines

Thank you for choosing to spend this time with us at Mustard Seed Communities. We welcome you and pray that your time with us is fruitful and blessed by God. Please keep in mind you are visiting a foreign country and you are representing your country and Mustard Seed Communities. Remember that this trip is about immersion into a culture. Although you may want to go out and buy things, the people you are serving don't have that option. This is a time to be patient and think of the group's best interest before your own. We thank you in advance for your service and dedication.

Culture – We ask that you act respectfully toward the local people and their way of doing things no matter what you may think of them. We especially ask that you be sensitive to all employees of MSC. In private, it may be natural to talk amongst yourselves about the differences you experience, but to comment when and where you can be seen or heard by the local people can be insulting and demeaning.

Staff Policy – We request that no money, gifts, or addresses be given directly to any MSC staff or residents. At the end of your trip, you may request that certain items that you leave be given to specific people. If you leave them at MSC, they will be distributed fairly so that multiple residents can benefit from your generosity. Often the residents and staff who have the most interaction with the mission teams receive gifts when others are overlooked. MSC asks that you give staff the discretion to distribute items evenly.

Safety – While traveling internationally, you should always be aware of your surroundings. In urban or crowded areas, pay particular attention to your belongings, as crime and petty theft are a more common occurrence in those environments. In general, the local people know why you are in their country and respect the fact that you are there to help. MSC provides mission personnel during transports at MSC sites, and there is security where you are staying.

To ensure a safe mission trip experience:

- Do not carry excess cash or wear unnecessary jewelry or valuables.
- On arrival at MSC, give all valuables (tickets, passports, large sums of money) to your group leader who will put them in a lockbox for the duration of the trip.
- Stay with your group at all times and don't leave the MSC compound unless it is absolutely necessary.
- **If you need to leave in an EMERGENCY:**
 - Inform your group leader
 - Go in groups of at least three or four
 - An MSC security guard or local staff member must accompany you.
- When traveling on the bus, please keep hands and arms inside the bus at all times.
- Beat the heat – wear a hat and sunscreen and drink more water than you would ever think possible – dehydration and excessive exposure to the sun and heat can lead to headaches, nausea and other undesirable conditions.
- Take care of yourself for the group's sake.

Alcohol/Tobacco/Drug Policies –

- **Alcohol:** No alcohol is allowed while participating in any Mustard Seed Communities mission trip.
- **Smoking:** No smoking is allowed at any of the Mustard Seed Communities properties.
- **Drugs:** Use or possession of illegal drugs is prohibited.
- **Open Flames:** Any time you are on MSC property, you are not allowed to have an open flame.
 - This includes candles.

Alcohol/Tobacco/Drug Policies (cont.) –

We are home for children, and as such, we fall under the government's policy for protecting children. If use of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, or open flames is discovered on MSC property, the local government could close the facility.

Guidelines for Group Living – Think of your group first. Whenever you are thinking of asking to do something, first consider what would happen if the entire group did what you wanted to do. Be respectful of your community by being on time and following the guidelines for working, praying, and playing. The rules are there to allow you more fun and freedom.

- **Participate, don't anticipate** – Be flexible and patient. Remember that your schedule may be altered at the discretion of MSC staff members. Try not to complain and keep in mind that you may not get everything you want, but MSC will provide you with everything you need.
- **Personal accountability** – Please remember that you are staying in a home for children and treat them as you would any other child.
- **Be respectful** of one another and MSC properties.
- **Jump right in** – Reach out to someone & learn new names each day
- Toilet paper and water are in limited supply – **please use sparingly**
- **Showers** – When showering, be considerate of the quantity of water you are using. In most of the cities MSC is located in, the city tends to shut off the water for most of the day. Therefore, a tank with water will be filled for showering and drinking. Please take **military showers**. In other words, get wet, turn the water off, shampoo and lather up, then turn the water back on to rinse off.
- **Sleeping Quarters** – Groups will divide up male and female. There are to be no males in the females' room and/or bathrooms and vice versa.
- **Waste** – Please do not waste food. Only take what you know you will be able to eat. When serving yourself, please be considerate of others who have not yet eaten.
- **Dishes** – All groups are responsible for cleaning the dining area and kitchen after each meal. The group leader should assign a person or team to take turns washing the dishes each day.
- **Quiet Hours** – After 11:00pm, lights are to be out in the designated sleeping areas and the rooms should be quiet for those who want to sleep. Others may stay up longer in the common areas provided that you respect those who are trying to sleep.

Photo Policy – MSC's greatest interest is our children. In order to protect their rights, each group **MUST** seek prior approval from each apostolate director before taking pictures. Just ask once you arrive.

PERSONAL & GROUP PACKING LISTS

WHAT TO BRING

- Old work clothes
- T-shirts, shorts, pants (no tank tops)
- Closed toe shoes
- 1 nice outfit for outings and Mass (women should wear dresses & men should wear long pants)
- Swimsuit (one-piece for females, please)
- Beach towel
- Towel for the shower
- Shower shoes
- Snack foods to share (optional, meals are provided by MSC)
- Spending money in small denominations
- Camera (use discretion if bringing an expensive camera)
- Work gloves
- One or two water bottles
- Hats/Bandanas
- Sunglasses
- Shampoo
- Soap
- Sunscreen
- Bug Spray
- Toothpaste
- Rain coat/umbrella (if rainy season)
- Set of warm layers (evenings can be cool)
- Personal Toiletries
- Antibacterial hand gel
- Bible, journal or other reading material for quiet time
- Any medicine you need
- Ear plugs
- Bubbles/Stickers for sharing with the kids
- Two rolls of toilet paper
- Safety glasses optional

*Keep a photocopy of your passport with you at all times.

*Many mission volunteers choose to leave their personal items at MSC as a donation. Please consider this when packing.

GROUP SUPPLIES

- Pens
- Paper
- Gatorade
- Garbage bags
- Medical Kit