

## Chapter 9

# Developing Ministry Skills through a Rural Mission Experience

Equipping young people / families for a life of  
**SERVICE**



Matthew 9:37,38

Jesus said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”



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This Rural Missions Strategy was first used by youth leaders to develop students for ministry. Later many churches have adapted this strategy for a Family-focused Mission Experience. Consequently, Rural Missions now has a dual ministry dimension from which churches can choose what best fits their ministry goals.

## **The Rural Missions Ministry Team**



**Tom Horton**, Founder and Director of Rural Church Youth Ministries, has promoted Rural Missions for 29 years and has now partnered with **Dr. Brad Butcher** of Passion4People, and **Dr. Dan Jester** of Apprentice Ministries, in order to serve churches interested in going rural.

All three men offer their services at no charge and are available to share the vision and strategy for rural missions. If you are interested in finding out more about what going rural looks like, you can reach any one of these men by calling or texting them at:

Tom Horton – 206-954-4100  
Brad Butcher – 503-957-1630  
Dan Jester – 608-843-9348

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

The following material was provided for those planning to take students on a rural mission trip. If you are interested in a Family Focused Rural Mission Experience, then, in some cases, you will need to make the necessary adjustments to the material in order to better prepare families for going rural. Of course, Tom, Dan or Brad can be of great help however the Lord leads you in providing your church what is necessary as you prepare for a rural missions experience.

# DEVELOP MINISTRY SKILLS

through a

## RURAL MISSION EXPERIENCE

### WHAT is a Rural Mission Experience?

A Rural Mission Experience is a **low-cost, high-impact**, 5 to 7-day, creative rural mission trip any Christian leader can use to better help those they serve build confidence in sharing their faith. A Rural Mission Experience is a unique ministry opportunity that can give participants significant ministry experience. By serving in a rural church's platform, team members can be engaged in a Great Commission-type ministry experience. Christian leaders can use the rural setting to bring about the spiritual depth and develop the ministry skills in individuals that desire to grow in their Christian faith.

### WHY should I do a Rural Mission Experience?

A Rural Mission Experience will provide your participants with the highest-level ministry experience **equipping them for a life of service**. While on a rural mission trip, the mission team will be challenged, stretched spiritually, and taken out of their comfort zone as they develop ministry skills through this hands-on ministry experience. By serving through a rural church, your team members will encounter Jesus Christ in life-changing ways. Your team will build bridges for the rural church that will enhance its community visibility. They also will learn and put into practice ministry skills which will equip them to be more effective back home.

### WHO, WHEN, WHERE, and HOW

Tom Horton, founder and Director of Rural Church Youth Ministries (check website at [www.ruralchurchym.org](http://www.ruralchurchym.org)) with Dr. Dan Jester of Apprentice Ministries and Dr. Brad Butcher of Passion4People can arrange the most conducive rural setting for your Rural Mission Experience. Mission teams can go rural at any time during the year, though most go during spring break or during the summer, whatever time best serves both the sending and hosting churches. There are materials available that will further explain how a Rural Mission Experience can work for you, plus materials that you could use in the training of your mission team that will prepare them for any ministry experience. **These materials and services are free.**

Think about it, when you produce spiritual depth in those you serve, you are entering into the spirit of Col. 1:28, "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ."

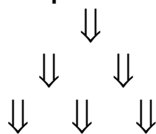
# Developing Ministry Skills in your Students through a Rural Mission Experience

1. Church Leadership



2. Trains Mission Team  
& Sets up a Rural  
Mission Opportunity

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3. Team members then  
**Lead** the Rural Mission  
Experience



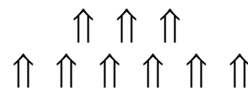
**4. The Rural Community  
is Reached**

8. Home Ministry is  
Deepened & Expanded



7. Team returns with  
Spiritual Depth

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**6. Mission Team Develops  
Ministry Skills**



**5. Rural Church's  
Ministry is Enhanced**

## PRODUCING FRUITFUL CHRISTIANS:

1. Develops a Paul/Timothy-type relationship between Team members and Leadership.
2. Inspires other team members to maturity and service.
3. Creates devotion and loyalty within leaders.
4. Cultivates a spirit of producing reproducers.
5. Fosters a kindred-spirit within ministry team.
6. Focuses on depth rather than breadth in the ministry.
7. Gives team members a clearer vision for life and service.

# **THE PRIMARY PRINCIPLES OF A RURAL MISSION EXPERIENCE**

## **PEER-TO-PEER EVANGELISM**

*4 nights includes food, activities (skits) & testimonies  
Family night programs are usually the basic structure as the youth  
outreach – some  
Teams have a BBQ every evening in a park close to the church  
Monday through Thursday*

## **SERVICE PROJECTS**

*4 days – representing Christ & the local rural church  
Monday through Thursday*

## **ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO CONSIDER:**

- Some teams include a children's program such as a Backyard Bible Club or a Daily Vacation Bible School.
- Most teams arrive on Saturday, attend service on Sunday, have a potluck dinner with the church family after church, do final preparations for the ministries which will start on Monday and head home on Friday or Saturday.
- Most teams sleep and eat at the host church – some have the girls stay in church family homes, keeping the boys at the church – while a few have the entire team stay at the church.
- Every rural mission program is tailored in a partnership with the rural church to reach the community with the gospel while encouraging Christians to continue in their walk with the Lord

*“Expect great things from God; and  
attempt great things for God”*

William Carey, Pioneer Missionary to India

(As a full-time Youth Leader, evaluation is a critical part of your ministry in order to keep you on track in providing depth as well as breadth to your program. Here is a simple evaluation tool.)

## **FIVE KEY QUESTIONS FOR ANY YOUTH PROGRAM:**

1. What kind of young person does the church want to deploy into the world at graduation?
2. What kind of youth program makes that kind of young person possible?
3. What kind of leadership team makes possible that kind of youth program?
4. What kind of youth leader makes possible that kind of leadership team?
5. What must happen in the life of the youth leader which will make him that kind of youth leader?

## **ADVANTAGES OF A RURAL MISSION EXPERIENCE**

### **For the Sending Church:**

1. Trains your youth and family members in **a variety of ministry skills & provides your team with a variety of ministry experiences** preparing them for a life of service:  
Outreach/Witnessing    Follow-up    Lead Activities    Skits    Testimonies  
Relationship Building    Modeling Basic Christian Disciplines
2. Establishes a link with a rural church for future ministry possibilities.
3. Gives your youth hands-on ministry experiences that are life-changing and gives each youth a clearer vision for a life of service. This type of ministry develops a strong core of your youth for ministry involvement as student leaders in your home church and in their public schools.
4. As a mission team **shares in this experience**, a unique bonding takes place building trust, loyalty, and a greater understanding of what ministry is all about in and through the team.
5. Provides youth a mission's experience which is **low in cost while high in potential spiritual transformation** in team members as they see God use them in through this rural mission experience.

### **For the Rural Church:**

1. Provides youth ministry and community outreach opportunities not possible otherwise.
2. Causes your Christian kids to get excited about the Lord.
3. Brings new youth and families into your church as the community is reached with the gospel.
4. Establishes the possibility of ongoing relationships between the two churches.
5. Gives lay leaders encouragement and resources with an increased vision for community impact through the rural church setting.

### **For Both Churches:**

1. Inspires spiritual excitement within the lives of all those involved.
2. Lays a strong foundation for a continuing relationship between the teens and adults from both churches as well as the church leadership.
3. Lays the foundation for future leadership in both churches. Through these type of ministry opportunities, young people catch a vision for what God can do through their lives.
4. Includes the adults in the youth ministry in ways that increases their understanding of youth ministry.

**For the Sending Church:** The mission team leaders should consider the following lists in making a decision for a rural mission experience in a rural church setting:

### **HOW TO START PLANNING FOR A RURAL MISSIONS TRIP**

1. This ministry experience needs to fall in line with your ministry convictions, vision, mission, and ministry style.
2. Determine the location of your first rural mission attempt. Start small and later, build up to something bigger if you want to. (Don't think you have to do a V.B.S. at the same time as a youth or community outreach.)
3. Gain support to accomplish the vision.
  - A. Interface with the pastor of the rural church and any lay-leadership for prayer and planning.
  - B. Have a strong prayer base. Recruit prayer warriors from your church to undergird your ministry venture with prayer.
4. Determine potential leadership.
  - A. Solicit from your youth leadership, those willing to commit to the outreach.
  - B. Determine from the older, more mature, and experienced youth who are in your youth group, those who can be involved in greater leadership roles  
**(remember your young people lead the mission, you merely facilitate it).**
5. Have a knowledge or know some background of the rural church and their leadership.
6. Know and confirm that the rural church leadership possesses confidence in your leadership ability to accomplish the objectives of the mission.
7. Think of how you would expand your style of doing youth ministry in order to gear the rural mission toward an outreach, such as adapting experiences from former Retreats, Overnights, Activities, Bible studies, etc., to a rural type setting.
8. Involve the larger church family in prayer support for outreach. Through church monthly newsletters, bulletins, and inserts/flyers, enlist as many prayer warriors as you can. Then be sure to give a report to the whole church as to what God did.

**Your success will be an answer to the prayers of others.**

9. Determine the particulars of the outreach. (This dovetails with point #10.) Training your youth, gathering resources, preparing materials and equipment, establishing a schedule, delegation of planned events and activities, etc. **Remember it is your goal for your young people (lay leadership) to run as much of the ministry as possible.**

10. Determine goals for the Rural Missions Experience: (How to achieve those goals is your plan.)

- a. The salvation of young people and adults from the rural community.
- b. The “making sure I am a Christian” process with the rural church’s youth.
- c. Exposure of youth to sound biblical teaching and prayer.
- d. The setting of a godly example by both leaders and young people.
- e. Showing young people that Christians have the best Fun! (Singing, games, activities)
- f. Igniting a vision to the rural church’s leadership of how an effective youth ministry can be developed and how it can become a source of great blessing to all involved. (By sharing your resources and experience and understanding of youth ministry, you will produce spiritual fruit by establishing lay and even student leadership in the rural church. Then they will, in turn, reach and establish teens in Christ from their own community.)

11. This potential ministry opportunity can be accomplished even by those with a low budget because a Rural Mission Experience can be executed at little expense for both sending and rural (host) churches. These ministries are usually extremely cost effective. ***I know of nothing that gives more spiritual “bang” for the investment that is put into it.***

By following through in this process, you can help a rural church to experience for themselves **success** in their own Youth Ministry and Community Outreach!

### **With a Rural Church:**

1. Try to connect with a rural church desiring encouragement and assistance with their youth. Determine potential rural church opportunities through: Church denomination, Church family, Bible College, Seminary contacts, or Rural Mission Ministries, etc. (Enlist Tom Horton, the director of Rural Church Youth Ministries, to locate a hosting rural church; he is willing to help you in this way.)

2. If possible, plan a meeting with the pastor and leadership of the Rural Church in order to evaluate needs and plan an outreach. Learn what the youth ministry experiences of the rural church has been and what the pastor’s youth ministry background is.

***It is important that the existing youth leadership and pastor of the rural church be involved in the outreach in as many ways as can be envisioned.***

(If the rural church is very small, a possible option of a joint venture with other churches in the community could occur in order to make the venture a community-wide event.)

For teams that will focus primarily on reaching youth:  
**Be sure to stress with your students:**

**1. That they must be prepared ahead of time for this ministry experience, this will be a spiritual warfare experience.**

Therefore, you need to determine what you think is a reasonable plan for the preparation of your young people for a home mission venture like this one. What are your requirements, which they will need to meet in order to go? What are their financial obligations and/or fund-raising expectations? When are the training times and what will they entail? (Remember, there are training materials available if you are interested.) Some groups started to get ready for a Rural Mission Experience at the beginning of the school year while others had a minimum of 8 weeks for their training schedule. If you are doing other ministries while on the camp, like work projects or a children's Bible School, they will add to your preparation needs.

**2. Specific areas which you will need to emphasize with your young people and leadership team:**

A. **A Servant Attitude** It cannot be overemphasized that a servant attitude is critical to a successful mission trip. A good passage to study would be **John 13:2–17**, or a topical study on the words "servant" and "serve." Make sure your young people understand that they are going to serve the Lord by serving the people of the rural church and its community. Also, it is very important that before you leave for home, you clean up, thoroughly, the church building and grounds. This is critical as a final statement of your servant attitude to the rural church.

B. **No Small-Town Talk** Instruct your ministry team that they all need to be very careful how they talk about the town you are serving in. Try to stay away from making comparisons which cause the young people from the rural community to think that you believe their town is small, dumb, outback, Podunk, etc. Much care needs to be given to respect the feelings and pride of the people in the town. Reminders may be necessary to curtail any talking down about the town before and during the ministry week. This can be a very sensitive area, so proper instruction will help with damage control.

C. **Representing the Rural Church** It is also important for everyone to understand that even though you are from out of town, you are representing the rural church and the Lord Jesus Christ, as you live, serve, and reach out to the young people of that community. You must not be an embarrassment to the rural church leadership nor leave them with unnecessary problems which they must resolve. If possible, you want to have an ongoing relationship with the rural church, so you need to build your relationship from the beginning. Your young people need to encourage the youth from the rural community (those they become friends with and lead to the Lord) to see that involvement in the local church is especially important for Christian growth.

D. **Team Ministry** Another area which needs to be stressed is the whole concept of Team Ministry. Each person going on this Rural Mission Experience is a critical part of the ministry team. Members are dependent on one another even though their individual roles are different. Each person's role is important for the success of the mission. This is part of being a servant. Nothing will ruin a Rural Mission Experience faster than disunity and division in the ranks of your mission team (more about this later.)

E. **Peer-to-Peer Mission Experience** Before they arrive in the rural town for ministry, your young people need to know that the whole focus of the mission is for them to be actively involved in the lives of the young people of the community. This will not be a spectator event, rather, it is an “everyone is a player” event. In addition to your young people understanding that there are going to be evangelistic activities for 4 nights, they need to be skilled in a gospel presentation and prepared to share something that is true between them and the Lord through the giving of their personal testimony at one of the evening share times.

## **The qualifications of the students going:**

Each Youth Leader needs to decide the particulars for his own ministry team. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Prior spiritual vitality** Make sure the young people you take on a Rural Mission Experience have demonstrated through practical means that they are ready to take another step in their Christian development. Guard yourself from taking young people who have not shown spiritual maturity nor compassion for the lost. (1 Tim. 5:22)
2. **Trustworthy** Never assume because the young people are on a missions-type venture that they will rise to the occasion. Trust is something you need to have already determined with every one of the young people you are taking on this trip. Trust involves decision making, role modeling, language, keeping one’s word, money, the property of others, etc. (Luke 16:10–12; 1 Cor. 4:1–2)
3. **Moral purity** Relationships within the group and with the youth in the rural community need to be guarded. Never allow couples to think their relationship is top priority on this trip. Keep an eye out for budding relationships and make sure only the couples who have self-control are allowed to go. (1 Tim. 2:20–22)
4. **Spiritual preparedness** Preparation for a Rural Mission Experience is essential. Every one of the young people from the sending church needs to be as spiritually ready as possible beforehand. (Some preparations can only be done while on the ministry outing, but do as much ahead of time as possible.) Training times are essential not only to prepare for this ministry experience, but also to give you another opportunity to determine a student’s spiritual readiness and moral character for ministries back home. (1 Pet. 3:15)
5. **Respect for authority** As the leader, you need students who have a healthy respect for your authority and that of the rural church and community. To have a spirit of rebellion erodes the spiritual health of any ministry team. Attitude and verbal responses need to be under the lordship of Christ. This is important not only between students and leaders but also between students and other students as well. (1 Pet. 5:5)
6. **Team attitude/spirit** Harmony between team members is critical. The “Lone Ranger” mentality divides the unity of any ministry group and needs to be defused from the beginning. Jealousy, competitiveness, criticism, comparisons, and complaining will make for a bad witness, both to the non-Christian and to the Christian youth in the rural community. (Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:1–5)
7. **Servant Heart** Here is where the rubber meets the road. Constant emphasis on service is needed. No one should ever complain that what’s required is unfair or too much to ask. Never allow anyone to get away with anything other than a servant-hearted attitude as you serve the Lord by serving the rural church and its community. (John 13:3–17; Matt. 20:25–28)

## **A WORD OF CAUTION:**

Each leader needs to be sure that the depth in the spiritual life of the ministry team is not at risk by taking someone who should not be there or who would be too much of a negative influence. Pray for great wisdom in putting together a ministry camp team.

## **REMEMBER TO:**

1. Emphasize the use of a **4 spiritual law**-type tract for the presentation of the gospel.
2. Make **response cards** and use them every night. Have everyone fill them out each time, at least by signing their name (this is so the young people will not “feel dumb” in indicating any commitments they have made. Then make a **phone list** from them and have some of your students call them the next day.
3. Make and use **Promotional Flyers** with the outreach schedule and location (they really work in rural communities).

## **THE BASIC FLOW OF THE ACTUAL GOSPEL PRESENTATION**

((PRAYER SUPPORT: Make sure you have secured the prayer support from both churches, yours and the rural church you are ministering through. Either make prayer cards for your home church and give them out weeks in advance of the Rural Mission Experience or have the prayer needs of the week’s outreach published in the church’s bulletin ahead of time. This is a critical ministry which the adults at home can have for the Rural Mission Experience. If it is possible to print the names of the young people and leaders going, so specific prayers can be made for them, please do it. The extra effort is worth it!!!!!!!))

## **A PLAN FOR THE NIGHT GOSPEL PRESENTATION:** (Each night builds on the previous night.)

*Each night before you break up for your informal time of interaction, have all those attending fill out a response card instructing them to write out any comments they may have. If they already have filled out a response card on a previous night, then all they need to do is fill in their names and mark any appropriate boxes, as well as make any comments that they would like to make about what has gone on so far. Be sure to make a master list of attendees for the rural church from the response cards.*

**1<sup>st</sup> night** – A low-key, casual approach. At the end of your first night activity and testimonies, inform the whole group that the visiting young people are prepared to share how they can become a Christian with anyone interested. (The whole idea here is to begin to set the stage for your youth to work from. Only on rare occasions does anyone ever become a Christian on the first night, though it has happened.)

**2<sup>nd</sup> night** – A low-key, yet more direct approach. When you have finished the second night activity and testimonies, everyone is a little more comfortable with each other and with the whole Christian witness thing. At the conclusion of the more formal time, instruct the whole group that the young people putting on this week’s events are going to ask the

hometown kids if they are interested in learning more about how to become a Christian. Your youth must interact with the rural community youth afterwards, getting into small groups or one-on-one situations, and just simply ask them if they would like to talk about how they can know they are going to heaven or how they can begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.

**3<sup>rd</sup> night** – A very direct, aggressive approach. At the end of your formal time, share with the whole group of young people that the kids from out of town have a little booklet called “Whatever you are using,” and that they are going to mingle with the local youth and ask if they would like to read through it with them. (Be sure your young people have plenty of the gospel tracts with them when they go out to share with the kids they have become friends with.) This is an exciting and spiritually challenging night for your young people. Remind them ahead of time that this is what they have prepared for. You will see some young people respond to the gospel and become Christians on this night, Praise God!!!! (Some youth leaders have been bold enough to have all the rural youth get into small groups with at least one of their young people leading the group through the gospel presentation.)

**4<sup>th</sup> night** – A more general, large group approach. On the last night of the outreach, if possible, have the key youth leader or pastor from the rural church share the gospel and lead the whole group in a prayer of commitment. Then ask everyone to fill out a response card indicating any commitments they have made this week and share any final comments.

## **ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO CONSIDER:**

1. **SPIRITUAL WARFARE** The devil is not going to leave you alone. The stakes are high, and the enemy is going to attempt to do anything and everything in order to make this Rural Mission Experience fail. In past experiences, spiritual warfare has been fought on these fronts:

A. Disunity among the ministry team members: between leaders, between leaders and their young people, between the young people from the sending church or even the rural church, between the rural church pastor and the visiting youth leader and/or his young people, (do you get the picture?). The issue of a critical spirit by anyone is a source of much contention.

B. Discouragement because of the spiritual battle, unmet expectations, the length of the ministry, fatigue, health, the critical mindset of the rural pastor and/or of the rural church family.

C. Obstacles which come from health, weather, transportation, change in schedule, or from limited resources.

2. **DEAD TIME** As much as you try to anticipate your ministry needs and schedule accordingly, the reality of “DEAD TIME” can be a problem for you. “Dead Time” is when it seems that there is nothing to do at the moment. Your young people must be encouraged to take advantage of “Dead Times” to make community contacts, prepare additionally for an upcoming event, take a nap, or create a new activity with the community’s young people. “Dead Times” are not evil in themselves, but they can be used by the devil if you are not aware of this problem.

3. **YOUTH MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY DIFFERENCES** The philosophical differences between a larger church with a full-time youth leader from a suburban community and a rural church with volunteer leaders can be tremendous. The seven last words of the church apply here. The “We have never done that here before” mentality can cause severe tension for a Rural Mission Experience. As much as possible, seek to determine “Policies” written and unwritten which the rural church may have, that can be a source of conflict between the two churches. The pastor of the rural church is key to this issue and must be respected by the visiting youth and their leaders while these philosophy differences are addressed. The reality of problems between a very conservative style of ministry (which rural churches have), and a contemporary “cutting edge” ministry style of a full-time suburban church youth leader, cannot be over-stressed here. “Traditions” are hard to change and may be difficult for the sending church’s youth and leaders to understand and adjust to. Again, these differences are not evil in themselves, but they can be used by the evil one to accomplish his purposes.

4. **A MINISTRY PARTNERSHIP** It’s important for the rural church to be involved with the sending church in the Rural Mission Experience. Ideally, partnerships need to be developed from the beginning. The ministry team from the sending church must be seen as an extension of the rural church leadership right from the beginning. The leadership of the rural church must not think that they are unneeded or unwanted in this outreach, but rather they need to be encouraged to participate in the outreach in some particular ways. While the full-time youth leader from the sending church is in charge of the ministry camp, it is best if the pastor of the rural church with any volunteer leaders be seen as part of the ministry team. Thus, they must have some ministry responsibilities. After the Potluck Dinner (which you want to have with the whole rural church family after the Sunday services to get acquainted) invite the church members to pray for, and possibly even help or at least come and observe, the youth outreaches of that week.

## **HOW TO BUILD ON WHAT GOD HAS STARTED?**

Once you have established a relationship with a rural church by doing some type of a rural mission, determine to continue an ongoing youth ministry involvement with that church, its volunteer leadership and youth. This can be done in several practical ways:

1. Encourage the youth that went with you on the mission to continue to be an encouragement and support to the particular young people they became friends with while on the ministry outreach. Through the phone and internet, young people are able to keep in touch with each other. Instruct your young people to be sure to share spiritual things with these new friends and to encourage them to attend the rural church and its youth activities.
2. While on the week’s outreach in the rural community, encourage the pastor and volunteer leaders to build on the success of the ministry camp. Suggest to them that you would be willing to do whatever you could to be a support and resource for them. Establish a framework to develop an ongoing relationship with them in their efforts to build a growing youth ministry in their rural church. Give them some ideas on what that might look like.

A. For instance, you might envision a way your best student leaders, who went on the mission trip, could be involved with their youth during the school year

(1) by visiting once every three months for a weekend, special encouragement time.

(2) by inviting some of the rural youth over to spend a weekend with you and participating with them in the youth ministry activity which they would be attending.

(3) by establishing a “prayer partner” exchange between both youth groups.

B. For instance, you might invite the rural church youth group over to join you on one of the retreats which you will run for your youth. This could be either summer or school-year camps or possibly even a special training or mission experience retreat.

C. You might volunteer to be a resource to the youth leaders and to the youth ministry of that rural church. Maybe you could be involved simply by sending your used youth ministry materials to them as a resource or involve yourself in leadership training and/or on a youth ministry consulting basis with those working with the youth in that rural church.

D. Hopefully, you can plan on a repeat rural mission trip the following year. By returning to the same rural church and community, you are able to do so much more for that church and its youth. It is spiritually healthy for your young people to have a continuing involvement with the rural youth as well. Going back gives a whole new perspective on the ministry involvement for your young people and for the rural youth leaders and youth.

**I TRUST GOD’S BLESSING ON YOU AS YOU LEAD YOUR STUDENTS  
ON A *RURAL MISSION EXPERIENCE.***

<>< Tom H.