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SAMARITAN WORLD

News for the friends of International Samaritan



Why We Do Trips

Dear Friends,

Before coming aboard International Samaritan last November, I had questions about the role of service immersion trips for the organization. Only two years earlier, I had written a book to inspire Christians to build long-term relationships with high-poverty schools in America's cities as an expression of their faith, and I was dubious about the impact that a one-week trip to a different nation could make.

When I started working here, I was a little bit surprised by the volume of people in the media who shared my concern. The first article on my desk, given to me by my new staff, was from the *U.S. Catholic*, titled, "If heroism is driving your mission trip, stay home". Soon I was onto "The White-Savior Industrial Complex" published in *The Atlantic* in 2012, which led me to "Savior Barbie's" Instagram account and her satirical escapades in Africa. The danger of following website links is that they usually lead to other articles reinforcing the same point of view. Finally, I landed on Robert Lupton's book, *Toxic Charity*, whose observations backed the critiques of all the articles I'd been reading.

These articles paint vivid guardrails on things to avoid in our line of work; however, they fall short in sharing what *should* be done. Certainly the answer is not to simply stop—to close the doors and draw our shades. In these polarizing times, we should be working harder at making connections with our neighbors, both locally and globally. Shrinking back to surround ourselves with people who look and think like us is hurting our nation and our world.

What I've learned over the last year is that International Samaritan has been focused on walking humbly and thoughtfully alongside communities since its inception 25 years ago. Firm in the belief that service immersion trips should continue—and that they can be improved—we share this edition of Samaritan World with you.

In gratitude,

Mike Tenbusch

President of International Samaritan, pictured with his daughter, Grace, a student at the University of Michigan, on the 2019 service immersion with the university's Ross School of Business to Guatemala

Bienvenidos-as Welcome Ütz



Favorite Photos from 2019 Immersions



"I had the honor of taking this picture. It was just after I was hired and it was my first time in a garbage dump, and I was so overwhelmed with everything I was seeing. But this woman... she was this light in the middle of it all. It was 105 degrees, the air was so thick with the smell of garbage that it was choking us, and there were fires literally feet from where we were standing, but she was radiant."

Hannah Wickham
Communications Coordinator

"We were able to provide health care in Jamaica for the first time this year with some incredible volunteers. Seeing them interact with children, like the baby in this picture, shows the impact we can bring beyond basic medical care."

Daniel Piaskowski
Medical Mission Coordinator



"Making a difference and an impact is why we do what we do. This year, we brought in a magician for a special school assembly. The pure joy we witnessed on the children's faces was unforgettable."

Emily Schleh
International Programs Coordinator



Why We Do Trips:

Are Service Immersions Helpful?

A recent article in the *U.S. Catholic* stated, "Many service projects do not engender healthy cross-cultural relationships or improve the local quality of life; instead, they do weaken those served and deepen dependency." It went on to state, "Many Christians in the West are either unaware of, or wish to ignore, the racism and white privilege that unconsciously determines how we approach other cultures.... Frequently we don't even realize our 'we know better' attitudes."

It's a fact that we, as Samaritans, can't ignore: Sometimes our best efforts to serve can do more harm than good if we're not specific in the methods and motivations of our service. To offer service that isn't harmful to the communities we serve in the ways that the *U.S. Catholic* warns us about, our work needs to be rooted in not just charity, but justice as well:

Charity: A social service that responds to the immediate needs of a group or individual. It is directed at the symptoms of injustice.

Justice: Social change that responds to the long-term needs of a group or individual. It is directed at the root causes of injustice.

The pitfall in service in which charities can fall, and the pitfall that the *U.S. Catholic* warns us about, is providing service that is only charitable - not just. To create work that is both charitable and just, the work needs to be consistent, sustainable, and driven by the community that we're serving - we need to make sure that we are assisting their own efforts to improve their community, not forcing them to adopt a temporary solution that may or may not be wanted or actually helpful. That is why we at International Samaritan have worked so hard, throughout our history, to lead trips in which the first priority is to be helpful to the communities in which we work.

Barriers to Just Service

Voluntourism *A form of tourism where travelers travel and participate in some form of voluntary work. Unfortunately, the brief nature of these programs often does not give volunteers a way to help the community in a sustainable way.*

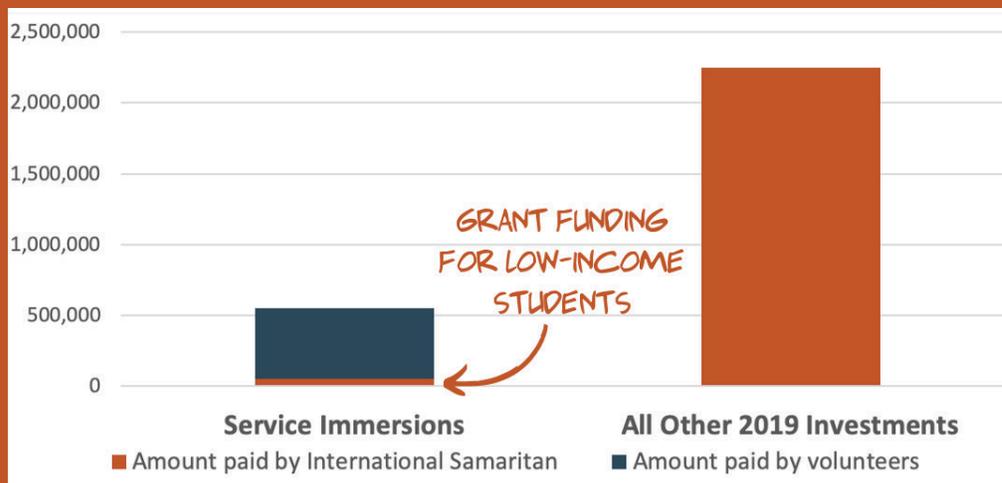
Savior Complex *When a citizen from a developed country approaches service with an intent to "rescue" individuals from less-developed countries from unfortunate circumstances. The mindset of "Rescuing" instead of "assisting" creates a sense of superiority towards those served, undermining their dignity.*



We take the following five steps to make sure that our trips are both charitable and just:

- 1.** We select local partners in each of our communities to lead our work. These people know their community best, so they choose the service projects and lead them, while our responsibility in the U.S. is to create conditions for them to do their best work every day.
- 2.** We ask our U.S. partners to make a commitment to engage in the same community year after year, and to work on supporting that community both while they're in-country and at home, including fundraising, fasting, and educating others throughout the year. We require this to create a sense of continuity between the school and the community.
- 3.** We conduct team reflections based on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching each day of our trips. These sessions are facilitated by our leaders in each nation, who can respond immediately and appropriately to questions by volunteers and who can keep the local perspective present in the room.
- 4.** We do not use money from our programs to pay for trips. With the small exception of helping cover the costs of low-income volunteers (which is financed through a grant), our trips are paid for by the volunteers who travel with us. No money that would otherwise be used for aid is spent.

International Samaritan 2019 Investment Spending



- 5.** Our organization continues serving in-country and year-round after our volunteers return home. As shown in point four, our service immersion trips are a small part of what we do, intended to supplement our other work. The facilities our volunteers help to build, the health outcomes we work to improve, and the educations we fund create long-lasting change.

In the following pages, you will find reflections on the impact of these five steps on those who have both served with us and those whom we have served.



Our Service Immersions in 2019

This year, International Samaritan facilitated over twenty service immersion experiences with fifteen partner schools. Those who traveled with us built a bathroom from the ground up, created two multi-sport courts, taught English classes, furnished classrooms, put the finishing touches on the Ave Maria Learning Center, built homes - and did so much more.

To the 315 individuals that served abroad with us this year: Thank you for being a Samaritan, and taking the time to stop... and change a life.

Costa Rica

We conducted our first ever service immersion in Costa Rica in 2019. We served the community of La Carpio. Special thanks to our pioneer service immersion group, St. Xavier High School!



Jamaica

After our successful launch last year, we returned to Jamaica this year with three groups. On these service immersions, we continued to serve the community of Riverton. We also launched our scholarship program in 2019, providing scholarships to 52 Jamaican students.



Thank you to our 2019 partners, from top left to bottom right:

- Notre Dame Academy
- University of Toledo Honors College
- Montini Catholic High School



Guatemala

We served in three communities in Guatemala: Zone 3 of Guatemala City, Chinautla, and Escuintla.

Thank you to our 2019 partners, from top left to bottom right:

- Bishop Watterson High School
- Marian High School (Group 1)
- Regis Jesuit Girls High School
- Mayfield High School
- Marian High School (Group 2)
- St. Ignatius High School
- St. Vincent St. Mary High School
- Walsh Jesuit High School
- St. Michael's Catholic Academy
- St. John's Jesuit High School & Academy
- University of Toledo Honors College
- Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan



Kebron and her brother at a Kids Vision preschool, which we support, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during her Summer internship.

Bringing Change Home

Born and raised in **Addis Ababa**, Ethiopia, **Kebron Assefa** moved continents after high school to study at the **University of Toledo Honors College**. When she heard about the possibility of spending spring break on an immersion trip in Jamaica as a part of her experience in the Honors College, it immediately interested her.

"I've always liked the music of Jamaica, and the colors, and it looked like a good opportunity to make new friends while also contributing something to a group of people." She did not know how much that week would change her.

On the first day of the trip, the Toledo team was talking about the focus of International Samaritan's work in communities around unregulated dumpsites. When Kebron heard that International Samaritan also works in **Kore**, the garbage dump for more than 6,000,000 people in her hometown of Addis Ababa, she remembered hearing about the landslide there a year earlier that had killed more than 130 people. She shared the story with her classmates but didn't think much of it at the time. Reflecting back, Kebron says, "I was talking about it from the outside. The landslide was something I glanced over and didn't really care to see."

Later that night, the reflection session included a video about one of our scholarship students from Kore, **Tewodros Belay**. In the video, Tewodros also spoke about the landslide, and his sister who was one of the people who was killed by it.



Kebron with Selam Terefe at the Kore Dumpsite.

"I just lost it," Kebron said. "He looked so familiar. When he talked about his sister, it was like he was talking about one of my own siblings. I couldn't control my emotions."

The trip to Jamaica only lasted the week of spring break for Kebron, but her commitment continued to grow. After returning to Toledo, she reached out to **Selam Terefe**, our country director of Ethiopia, to learn more about the world just miles from her childhood home that she knew nothing about. "Selam made me feel like I had known her forever. She has that effect on people," Kebron says. "I knew that I wanted to work with her right away... So I returned home to Ethiopia when school ended and spent the whole Summer working alongside Selam in Kore."

Kebron's job was to shadow Selam with a notebook and to capture the stories of hundreds of people who were vying for 65 new scholarship opportunities. Kebron told us that she "quickly realized that she was part of a small portion of people in the world who have the ability to sleep at night on a full stomach in a bed with a warm blanket. No one in my family knew how to get to Kore, even though my dad works near there. It's incredible to know I had to go to an entirely different country to realize what I did not know. That was a reality check for me."

The most difficult day for Kebron occurred when she interviewed a mother who had lost a child to starvation. "It was destroying her," Kebron says, "because of how much the child suffered, and because she felt like it was her fault because she couldn't provide for her own child." Telling the story to her mom that night, Kebron collapsed into tears. She was so disturbed that it upset her parents, too. They didn't know what to do or say—for Kebron and for this woman she met in Kore. That night, her mom went out to the store and bought as many blankets and as much food as they could afford, and they went back to Kore and passed it out that night.

"My mom just kept saying," Kebron recalls, "I don't know how to help everyone but we're going to help who we can."

Even though Kebron is now back in Toledo, Kebron continues to talk to Selam to keep updated about what's going on in Kore. "This experience made me realize how difficult living here can be for certain people - but also how much we can do to help each other," Kebron shared. "I hope the work being done in Kore continues to grow."



Kebron with her classmates and a student in Jamaica.

Responses to *Toxic Charity*

After reading Robert Lupton's book, *Toxic Charity*, we asked our staff abroad and several of our long-time partners what, for them, made service immersions important. You'll see our questions in blue and their responses in orange:

International Samaritan:

In his book *Toxic Charity, How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)*, author Robert Lupton states, "Service projects and mission trips do not effect lasting change. Within six to eight weeks after a mission trip, most short-term mission-trippers return to the same assumptions and behaviors they had prior to the trip."

Phil Skeldon (Partner at St. John's Jesuit High School & Academy):

My sense is that if you're a 40-year-old person who goes on one trip and that's it, then yeah, that's a problem. But if you're a 17-year-old who has never done anything like this, it can change your view of the world for life. It can change what you care about and what you study. It can change your occupation. We have plenty of examples of that - we've seen it happen with our alumni.

Fr. Dan Reim, S.J. (Partner at St. Ignatius High School):

These experiences give students hooks into the broader world. Prior to the trip, news about hurricanes or immigration challenges may not matter to you. But once you've gone, you're hooked. You've got a connection there, and these things matter to you. From a Christian standpoint, the connections made on these trips are huge. It's the heart of Catholic Social Teachings that get us to experience that we are all sisters and brothers.

International Samaritan:

Lupton gives an example of a church trip to Central America to paint a school and points out that if the church would have just given that money to the school instead of going on the trip, the school could have hired two local painters and two teachers and bought a new school uniform for every student.

Sarah Daniel (our International Service Coordinator):

Our service immersions actually allow us to invest more in the communities we serve, not less. It's part of the model: International Samaritan first provides scholarships and aid, then hires local professionals to oversee projects, and lastly brings in service immersion volunteers to help. Because our service immersions are paid for by the volunteers and the volunteers provide free labor on projects, we're able to invest what we would have had to spend on additional laborers into providing more scholarships and aid.



Tavian Jones (*our Trip Leader in Jamaica*):

It's not just about the projects - it's about the relationships that are built. This year, Montini High School built a house for one woman who had recently lost her spouse. She was grateful not only for their help, both with building the house and watching over her kids while she was working, but also just spending time with her during this very difficult time in her life. It's like the group was saying, "I'm not just giving you something, but I'm leaving a part of me here and I'm taking a part of you with me". When it was time to say goodbye, they seemed to be family members parting.

International Samaritan:

But isn't it kind of selfish to use trips to other countries as a way of helping to educate kids in the United States?

Phil Skeldon:

In the long run, what this does is help kids become adults who are committed to justice and to helping people in the world, sometimes locally but also globally. The way you do this—by going back and back and back again—that's what matters. If International Samaritan only went once to a community, it wouldn't be worth it. But you do.

Sheila Geary (*Partner at Marian High School*):

If we only did the trips, then, yes, it would be [selfish], but we've come to see this as a year-round relationship and a year-round process. The girls who go on trips spend a semester learning about Guatemala before they go, then they come back and spend the rest of the year raising money and advocating for the people they met... These service Immersions aren't a short, one-time experience. They're a commitment.

Renate Krings (*our Project & Service Manager in Guatemala*):

Working to achieve cultural understanding is the opposite of being selfish. Besides the direct outcome of a project, like the creation of a new house or classroom, the students are taking the time to listen and recognize the realities that the people [they're serving] face, and that has made the community members feel seen and heard. It's a process of empowerment.



St. Michael's Catholic Academy with our scholarship students in Zone 3, Guatemala. This was our first service immersion group of 2019!

Finding his Future in Translation

Do you recognize the young man in the pictures below? Several of our readers might. Many of you met **Jorge**, a scholar from our *Paso a Paso* program, on your service immersion to **Cuidad Santino, Nicaragua**.

"I was in high school when I learned about [International Samaritan] and received my scholarship," Jorge explained. "My mom, **Argentina**, was president of my school's parent-teacher organization, and when she found out International Samaritan had opportunities to learn to speak English, she pushed me to start volunteering on their service immersions to meet American students to practice my English."

Andrew Pawuk was leading the team from the U.S. at the time. "I just remember he was a really shy and kind of awkward teenager at first," Andrew recalls, "but our volunteers really liked working with him."

Jorge sees it similarly. Looking back on that first trip, he says, "I felt nervous because I did not know the language, but by the end of the year I could understand 50-60% of English. It was something incredible to achieve understanding! I never thought that would happen."

Jorge volunteered on service immersions through the rest of his high school career, eventually acting as a translator as he grew more confident in his abilities. He told us that he really treasured those years with the volunteer groups.

"To be able to help them was something incredible. It was a really amazing experience," Jorge says, "and the service immersions changed my path. I never thought that I would go to university. I thought I would have work as a driver of some sort. But in just sixteen months I will be a licensed professional!"

Currently in his last year of his degree in English, Jorge has emerged as a mentor to others from his community and is now nudging others to succeed as well. He tells younger students, "You need to escape from their circle in order to move forward, because if you remain in your circle you'll just keep going around and around in the same spot."

To all of the volunteers who met Jorge on their service immersions to Nicaragua, he asked us to share this:

"I have made a lot of friends from service immersions and I would like to invite you to return. I would like to see all of you again one day, and to thank you for helping us here in Nicaragua."



Left: Andrew Pawuk and Jorge, after discussing Jorge's six-year journey with International Samaritan.

Right: Jorge in high school, assisting on a medical mission as a scribe and translator.

A Family Legacy of Service

Only nine months after their first child was born, **Scott and Molly Filippini** found themselves packing their bags for Nicaragua. What would cause them to do something like that?

"The Holy Spirit," Scott told us with a chuckle.

Molly and Scott both went on immersion trips to Latin America when they were in high school. Years after those initial trips, Scott and Molly found themselves still wanting to help - but they weren't sure what to do or how. When Scott called **Andrew Pawuk** at International Samaritan to ask what he could do, "Andrew asked, 'Why don't you go on a trip and see for yourself?'"

So the Filippinis' parents happily babysat their newborn son for a week while Scott and Molly went to Granada, Nicaragua to give local teachers training in autism detection and to help build a house that they helped to fund.

"We got there just after the **Regis Jesuit Girls Division** was there," Scott recalls, "and the foreman on the job said that the Regis girls were the most effective and hardest-working group he's ever worked with. All that was left for Molly and me was to paint the house."

The Filippinis have continued to help fund the construction of a house every year for each of the last three years since their trip. When the most recent house was finished, they saw a picture of it and saw International Samaritan team member **Francisco Davila** in it. "We ate meals with him, in his house!" they exclaimed, recalling their deep connection to the community and local leaders. "To know that he is still involved keeps us wanting to be involved too."

Molly and Scott have two children now, **Lucas, 5, and Marko, 3**. Molly says that they talk candidly with them about what it means to not have a home or three meals a day. "Lucas has a lot of admiration for garbage men, and he understands that it's different when they have a truck and a landfill and safety in their job."

For the Filippinis, their experience traveling as students grew into to a legacy of serving others in their adult lives, and now they're passing their legacy to the next generation.



Scott and Molly's Story

Scott and Molly are pictured above in green with their team. Pictured right are our staff with the home recipients in front of their partially complete home.



Dear Friends,

My father served in Burkina Faso in the Peace Corps, and my cousins have lived and served in marginalized communities across the globe. So, venturing with 16 of my classmates from the University of Detroit Jesuit High School as a senior in 2008 to El Ocotillo, a garbage dump community near San Pedro Sula, Honduras, was an opportunity to “taste and see” for myself what family members had been sharing with me all my life.

Our trip was an emotional and physical roller coaster, assisting in the construction of two homes and of a nursery for children so their parents would not have to bring them to work in the garbage dump. With limited Spanish skills, I discovered my sight and smell to be overly attuned to this new ‘world’ I was encountering. I remember speaking with Don Benedicto, a local resident and waste collector, as flies swarmed around us and vultures soared in circles above us in the dump. As we listened, children played soccer barefoot on top of dirt laden with glass and syringes. Women and men sorted through the garbage of the city’s 1.5 million people.

Seeing such a brutal reality – conscious of how radically different my own childhood was – and smelling steamy waste under the scorching sun, I was experiencing a mixture of sadness, anger, disgust and discomfort. Later that same morning, children, teachers and community members welcomed us into the local school. I experienced awe during their stories of achievement and perseverance, of hope and faith in a God who does not abandon His people, but rather walks with them in their struggles. Encountering others, especially the poor and marginalized, is a deep grace that disrupts biases and misconceptions, compels profound compassion and action, and invites an honest contemplation of the complex, often harsh, yet incredibly beautiful world around us.

During one of our evening reflections, we read aloud these words from the prayer of St. Oscar Romero, “We plant seeds that one day will grow.” Our labor during the trip was appreciated, but could have happened if we weren’t there. What I began to notice within me though was a slow, long process of personal transformation. My stomach felt squeamish knowing of the drastic disparities between those in the South and those of us in the North. I was enraged that some of our nation’s policies perpetuated the cycle of violence, exclusion, and death that has characterized much of Central American history.

That trip was the start of something new. Seeds sewn through close, personal encounters with Don Benedicto, Wilfredo, Apolinaria, Jacky, Gladis, and Nefi. At first, merely names and faces who later became friends and sojourners in this struggle for a more just, humane world. I never expected to return to Honduras after that trip in 2008.

But I did. I have been back to Honduras countless times. And these friendships have been vital to how I contemplate and engage the world, how I enter into just relationships with those who are often excluded and discarded.

I slowly began to identify with my faith at a deeper, personal level. My faith, particularly my relationship with God, became less theoretical and more relational. Faith was lived out in relationship with others. And that meant that living out my faith only made sense when it was joined together with a struggle for justice. These friendships transformed how I engaged the world, no longer as an unaffected North American bystander, but now as an active companion walking with hope-filled women and men trampled by policies of exclusion and oppression yet liberated from the status quo.

What has come as a surprise is how these initial encounters with those on the margins planted seeds that have blossomed into a beautiful, challenging and grace-filled vocation. A vocation as a Jesuit that has ushered me into the hopes and pains of people in Chicago, Peru, Honduras, and now South Sudan.

My vocation, to summarize it in one verb, is to *permanecer* (to remain). To be with the people entrusted to me and to whom, in turn, I have been entrusted. To place my whole self – my yearnings, my limitations, my skills, my desires – with them in their endeavors for building a more just and gentler planet.

I now find myself accompanying Sudanese refugees in a refugee camp in Sudan, the youngest nation in the world, a nation riddled by poverty, corruption and insecurity. I spend my days walking with youth and supporting them in their efforts to become better versions of themselves, to be the leaders their communities need them to be. I bear witness to the barbarity of violence inflicted by tribal conflicts and unjust economic and social structures. I bear witness to the frustration of unemployed and uneducated youth that often leads to despair. Yet, I also bear witness to daily acts of hope and resilience as young women pursue their education despite certain cultural practices. I enjoy the friendship and solidarity of countless people who desire human connection and relationship, who recognize the goodness and personhood inherent in us all. I recognize my own role in perpetuating conditions of marginalization and exclusion as well as my contribution to alleviating suffering and promoting justice and reconciliation.

From a 17-year-old in a garbage dump community in Honduras to a 28-year-old in a refugee camp in South Sudan, much has undoubtedly changed. Yet, much is still the same. I continue to encounter people and realities that probe my heart, awaken my conscious, disrupt my comfort, invite me to walk with them, and usher me into radical, unconditional love and mercy.

Sincerely,

Matthew Ippel, S.J.

International Samaritan Alumnus

Pictured right on his trip to Honduras 11 years ago and above with three of the young men in South Sudan.



OUR MISSION

International Samaritan works hand in hand with those living in garbage dump communities around the world to help them break out of poverty.

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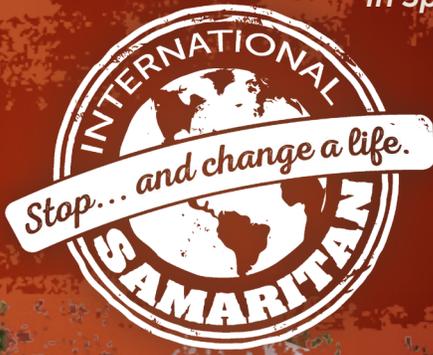
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Summer 2019

SAMARITAN WORLD

News for the friends of International Samaritan



In this issue, learn about the growing issue of voluntourism in international service trips – and what International Samaritan is doing to push back against it.