

# The MDS Hitchhiker's Guide to Volunteering



Tips for making  
your service trip  
more meaningful



## Mennonite Disaster Service

is a volunteer network through which various constituencies of the Anabaptist church can respond to those affected by disasters in Canada and the United States.

While our main focus is on clean up, repair and rebuilding homes, this activity becomes a means of touching lives and helping people regain faith and wholeness.

# Spirit-led Grassroots movement Christ-like service

## Where do you need me?

MDS is the organized response of our churches to the needs of “neighbors” in times of disaster, following Christ’s example by giving time, talents and energies to help relieve suffering.

MDS focuses on assisting people who are not covered by traditional means of recovery. MDS helps the most vulnerable – single parents; people who are elderly or handicapped; and the unemployed, uninsured and underinsured.

People skilled in construction and/or leadership are essential to MDS, yet we can use and train each volunteer, regardless of skill. We welcome anyone over the age of 15 who wishes to serve.



### Contact us:

MDS Binational Office

583 Airport Road

Lititz, PA 17543 USA

717-735-3536 Fax 717-735-0809

toll-free 1-800-241-8111

MDS Extension Office

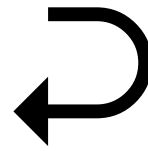
6A-1325 Markham Rd

Winnipeg, MB R3T 4J6 CANADA

204-261-1274 Fax 204-261-1279

toll-free 1-866-261-1274

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## 4 PILLARS OF AN MDS PROJECT



**VOLUNTEERS**  
MDS facilitates long-term volunteers who typically serve 1-3 months and short-term volunteers who usually serve one week.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**  
MDS provides a place to house 20 to 50 volunteers, including cooking and dining facilities.



**MEANINGFUL WORK**  
MDS coordinates clean up and construction work that serves people who have experienced a disaster.

**FUNDS FOR BUILDING MATERIALS**  
Partner organizations provide the funding needed to purchase building materials.



*"You came as strangers, and now you leave as friends."*



*Keni Keni*  
MDS Executive Director

## WELCOME TO MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

In response to volunteers' work, disaster clients often will say, "You brought your hammers and your hearts and you gave us hope. You came as strangers, and now you leave as friends."

We as Mennonites believe in following Jesus concretely, which translates into loving our neighbors and serving the less fortunate. MDS is not a building or an institution but a people's movement led by God's spirit to respond out of our compassion, obedience to the scriptures and gratefulness to God.

As you begin your journey with MDS, come prepared to be stretched and challenged as you find joy in serving others. Jesus encourages us that, "Whatever you did for these members of my family, you did for me." (adapted from Matthew 25:40)



*"There is no place like home."*  
Lloyd & Catalina Boisseau,  
New Orleans



Experiencing  
a new  
(to you)  
culture

# 5 ways to be a good guest

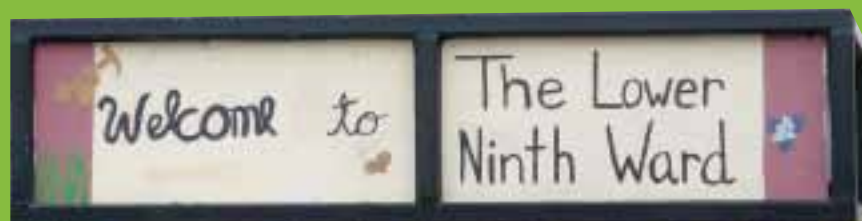
Speak with respect. (And take off your sunglasses.)

Listen with an open heart. Take the time to talk with disaster survivors and hear their stories.

See with new eyes. Take the attitude of a servant as Jesus did. Make an effort to enter the community in which you are serving with no preconceptions. Be aware of how racism or prejudice might affect what you see.

Think big. Don't assume that all members who live in a community have the same beliefs and practices.

Expect things to be different. We are all more comfortable with what is familiar to us. Consider your own culture and how it shapes your perspective.



# How many fingers do you see?

## TIPS TO STAY SAFE WHILE YOU SERVE

1. Drink. And drink more. Drink lots of water in hot climates.
2. Wear sunscreen and insect repellent.
3. Wear durable clothing covering shoulders to knees.
4. Always wear closed-toe shoes.
5. Wear a hard hat when necessary.
6. Wear gloves when working with sharp objects.
7. Wear safety goggles when working with power tools.
8. Wear protective masks when working with dust or mold.
9. Set up ladders and scaffolding properly.
10. Use your legs to lift heavy objects.
11. Exercise extreme caution when working with power tools.
12. Report unsafe conditions to crew leader.
13. Ask for help when you need it.
14. Did you remember to drink?

### Insurance

Please bring your health insurance card with you. MDS does not carry medical or accident coverage for volunteers.



MDS provides safety equipment. Read on-site safety information.

# MDS fashion 101

DRESSING FOR THE PROJECT SITE

## MODESTY PLEASE

Wear durable clothing and follow these fashion rules when serving on MDS project sites:



Closed-toe shoes to work in



Shirts with sleeves  
Covered midriff  
No plunging necklines



Knee-length shorts or long pants

## Why do you need to dress modestly?

- Respect for the diverse groups that serve with MDS.
- You are a witness to the communities in which we work.
- Safety: Exposed skin is more likely to be sunburned, bitten by bugs and scratched while working. Exposed toes are more easily injured.



Dress for the season.  
Did you check the weather at your destination?  
Layers work best for winter and wet weather.



"Be prepared to work hard."



# Words of Wisdom

PAST VOLUNTEERS TELL YOU WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE



A day in the life of an MDS volunteer  
by John Longhurst, MDS volunteer in Louisiana

So what's it like to be part of an MDS crew?

The day starts around 6am when the alarms go off. We make lunches for the day and then eat breakfast. After morning devotions, we get our gear and head off to our various work sites.

While at our work sites, we take water breaks whether we think we need it or not. It's hot down here! It was very hot inside the house I was working in. There was no breeze and it was very humid too. The idea of sweat pouring down in rivulets is no longer just an expression.

We returned to our MDS home by 5pm, unloaded the gear, cleaned up and had supper. Meals are prepared by the cooks who volunteer with MDS. And, yes, the food is great!

Evenings are open. We visited the work sites of other groups and learned more about the catastrophic effect the storm had on this community.

On Wednesday evenings, MDS invites local residents who share their stories with volunteers.

Bed comes early, around 10pm. No one really feels like staying up late; we're all too tired. But it's a good tired, the kind of tired that says you had a good, hard and worthwhile day.

"I have to say that MDS is addictive."



"You actually feel like you're making a difference."



"Be willing to be flexible."



"You will be a blessing and you will be blessed."

# What to expect

WHAT EVERY VOLUNTEER WISHED THEY KNEW BEFORE SERVING



## Typical daily schedule

6:00	Wake up
6:30	Make your own bag lunch
7:00	Eat a hot breakfast in dining room
7:30	Devotions
7:45	Get your job assignment
8:00	Load tools & head to work site
12:00	Eat lunch
4:00	Clean up work site
5:00	Return to camp
6:00	Eat supper in dining room
7:00	Wash dishes
7:30	Free time (except Wednesday)
10:00	Bedtime

**Wednesday evenings** are set aside for worship, fellowship and sharing. Often local residents are invited to share their stories with volunteers.

**Weekends** may include time for rest, preparation for the following week, camp maintenance and group activities. Church attendance is expected Sunday morning.

## The basics you need to know

1. Be prepared to be flexible.
2. Work 40-45 hours a week.
3. Commitment to quality work.
4. Be willing to work as a team and take direction from project leadership.
5. Take time to listen to homeowners and community members.
6. Work and share accommodations and meals with other individuals and groups.
7. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are provided Monday thru Friday.
8. Participate in orientation, devotions and Wednesday evening sharing. You may be asked to lead a devotional.
9. Help with nightly and end of the week clean up (vehicles, building, camp maintenance, dishes).
10. Alcohol, tobacco and illegal substances are not acceptable on camp property or job sites.
11. Pets are not permitted.

## Especially for RV volunteers



- Work four 6-hour days a week.
- Live in your recreational vehicle (must be self-contained).
- Make your own meals.
- Commit for a minimum of four weeks.

# FOR CANADIAN EYES ONLY

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO DO BEFORE CROSSING THE BORDER



1.

Don't forget your passport  
Make sure your passport is up-to-date. You will need it when crossing the border.

2.

Get your border crossing letter

You can obtain this letter by filling out the border crossing form provided on our website or by contacting the Winnipeg, Man., office. Forms must be sent to the Winnipeg office no later than one month prior to departure.

3.

Purchase travel insurance  
Buy travel insurance for the number of days you will be gone. MDS does not carry health or accident insurance for volunteers.

4.

Prepare to buy a USA visitor visa

Take at least 6 dollars cash (U.S.) with you as custom officials might ask you to purchase a visa. (They do not accept credit cards.)

5.

Use the right words

When crossing the border, use the words "volunteer" and "serve." Do not say "work" or "job" as they imply being paid. Only show the border crossing letter if asked.

Contact us:

MDS Extension Office  
6A-1325 Markham Rd  
Winnipeg, MB R3T 4J6  
CANADA  
866-261-1274 Fax 204-261-1279  
mdscn@mds.mennonite.net

# ARE WE THERE YET?

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING TRANSPORTATION AND ACCOMMODATIONS.

Short-term volunteers (usually 1 week)

Long-term volunteers (about 1 month or more)

RV volunteers (4 weeks)



## TRANSPORTATION

YOUR CHURCH OR YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY MAY HELP TO FUND THE COST OF TRAVEL.

- ▶ You are responsible for making your own travel arrangements to and from the project.
- ▶ MDS does not pay for the cost of travel.
- ▶ You may be asked to use your personal vehicle to travel to work sites.
- ▶ MDS vehicles are not for personal use.

- ▶ MDS will assist you in making travel arrangements.
- ▶ MDS will pay for the cost of travel.
- ▶ You will be picked up from the airport if needed.
- ▶ You may be asked to use your personal vehicle to travel to work sites.

- ▶ You are responsible for making your own travel arrangements to and from the project in your RV.
- ▶ You may request a travel reimbursement from MDS.
- ▶ You may be asked to use your personal vehicle to travel to work sites.



## ACCOMMODATIONS

FINANCIAL GIFTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF MDS.

- ▶ Lodging and meals are provided at no cost.
- ▶ Men and women are housed in separate quarters.
- ▶ E-mail and laundry facilities are not provided.



- ▶ Lodging and meals are provided at no cost.
- ▶ Every MDS site is different. Accommodations vary.
- ▶ E-mail and laundry facilities are provided.

- ▶ Your self-contained RV is your lodging. MDS provides the RV parking site with full hookups at no cost.
- ▶ You make your own meals.
- ▶ Where possible, laundry services and telephone and internet hookups are provided.



