

To be clear of our understanding and expectations, we are asking all participants to agree to our mission covenant, before electronically submitting their Registration Form. This mission covenant is an important part of the safety and health of our team members - young and old alike. It is also a product of some rare, but unfortunate experiences over the years on our missions, and with other organizations affiliated with us. I sincerely wish we did not need it, but it is a reality for us. I realize it is uncomfortable for some, especially adults who are not accustomed to restrictions on the freedoms of behavior they enjoy in the U.S., and/or on their own vacations abroad. I understand this burden. However, we are working in a developing country, and it is also a great burden of responsibility for myself, my wife, my leadership team, and Santa Clara Christian School, our sponsoring organization. I assure you, although it is far from perfect, this document has been carefully researched, crafted, debated over, and prayed about by many people, and updated annually. I pray for your understanding, patience, grace, and compliance in good faith. I sincerely apologize for any inconvenience, and I wish and pray for the best possible mission experience for us all. Thank you. Sincerely, Shawn Smith, Director, Now Is the Time for Missions

“Now is the Time” Mission Covenant - Guatemala 2017

This covenant, or agreement, is designed for the safety, health, and well-being of the mission, mission participants, leaders, and those we are serving in the name of Christ, as well as our sponsor organization Santa Clara Christian School, Shawn Smith’s ministry, and our hosts in Guatemala. Guatemala is a developing country, and certain places, and behaviors can be dangerous for Americans. Although we have never had a serious safety issue, and we work hard to provide safe environments for adults and children, we ask all participants to agree to the following to help ensure a safe, healthy, and fruitful mission.

Additionally, many of the people of Guatemala, especially indigenous populations we are trying to serve, have very conservative, traditional customs. In an effort to preserve their dignity, we ask participants to agree to certain personal behaviors during the mission. We are guests in the country that we serve. Our priority is that we have a positive affect on the lives of our host communities, and put their needs and customs above our own. We have been a role model in these communities and we try to act accordingly. We also want our volunteers to have an experience that honors themselves, their family, their community, their church or other organization. For these reasons, personal conduct should always strive to be above question. Behavior during personal time before or after the mission (i.e. tourism, or language school before or after the mission) is at the participant’s will, but discretion is strongly encouraged and advised. Many of those we are serving have jobs in the service and retail industry in Antigua, and the presence and behavior of American tourists, missionaries, and volunteers is obvious, and noteworthy.

The time of “The Mission” is defined from the time participants are picked up at the airport, to the time they depart Guatemala, including our Sabbath on Saturday. If team members are participating in tourism, or the language school before or afterwards, “the mission” is considered the time of arrival and departure at the mission lodging sites on Sunday.

Mission participants and leaders are asked to agree to the following during the mission:

- Everyone is expected to be personally responsible for their own safety.
- Everyone is expected to notify their leader of their presence at all times (on and off worksites)
- If you have children or youth in your care, leaders will assist you, but you are expected to be responsible for them during the mission.
- We agree to NEVER GO ANYWHERE BY OURSELVES. (including at our worksites, and on Saturday)
- We agree to NEVER GO ANYWHERE AFTER DARK without a leader’s permission (including Saturday).
- We agree there will be no use of alcohol by youth, or adults during the mission. (For further explanation, see below). People who have personal issues with alcohol, are asked to not attend the mission.
- There will be no use of illegal substances while in Guatemala during the mission
- Smoking is strongly discouraged. If you must use tobacco, please notify a leader to discuss appropriate times and places to do so. We agree not smoke in front of those we are serving.
- We agree there will be no sex outside of marriage during the mission, and we will not display forward romantic behavior.
- We agree that there will be no inappropriate language, gestures, or clothing while on the mission. (If in doubt, ask a leader.)
- We agree to not bring electronics, jewelry, cash/credit cards, or valuables to worksites. (best to not bring to Guatemala at all)
- We agree to not give things out such as candy, gum, money, food, photos, toys, gifts, etc. except through a leader.
- We agree to not tip drivers, hotel staff, local volunteers, etc. All workers will be appropriately compensated by the mission.
- We agree to only drink purified water and eat food prepared by the mission, or by trusted establishments (i.e. restaurants in Antigua). Eating “street food”, or food offered by hosts in the villages, is discouraged for health reasons.
- We agree to respect and honor the ten commandments, and teachings of Christ as found in the Bible.
- Everyone is expected to serve where needed, with open hands and hearts.
- Everyone is expected to attend all crew meetings, evening programs, and mission activities.
- If you are ill, or if there is a problem that restrains you from participating in mission activities, it is your responsibility to notify a leader and/or get medical attention immediately.
- Everyone is expected to have respect for the Guatemalan culture and it’s people at all times.
- Everyone is expected to have respect for mission leaders and fellow team members, and their religious beliefs
- We agree to respect the Sabbath, and keep it holy (i.e. There will be no work projects on Saturday) .
- We agree to try to remember that we are serving as ambassadors of Christ, and of the U.S., both on worksites, and off.

Upon signing my Registration Form electronically, I agree to the above covenant, and any other spoken directions from crew leaders, or mission hosts. I understand that if I should break this covenant, there may be consequences, including possible dismissal from the mission, and return to the United States, forfeiting any individual rights to financial or other remuneration. I will always try to remember that I am here on this mission to serve others in the name Christ, and will try to act accordingly.

Why is "No drinking of Alcohol" included in the Mission Covenant?

We work very hard at making our teams comfortable during the mission while in Guatemala, because we love and respect our volunteers, and we believe that a safe and healthy team, is a productive team. However, there are some discomforts that all team members must endure...some of them physical, some emotional, and for some, social and religious. We have done our best at trying to minimize the risk to the mission's health, safety, and welfare by crafting a mission covenant. One item that can be uncomfortable for some adults, is asking them to refrain from consuming alcohol during the mission, even in moderation.

Our mission covenant is not solely a product of mine, but of many mission organizations that we consulted, and perhaps most importantly, the leaders of the communities we serve. There are religious, but also cultural, health, safety, and legal reasons for the included items. It is not a perfect document, and I apologize that it is uncomfortable for some, but it is a reality for us. Not drinking alcohol during the mission is one of those items that some have questioned the purpose of.

The Lutheran Center in Antigua, where we have had teams stay in the past, who is supported by both the Missouri Synod and ELCA Lutheran churches in the U.S., prohibits all alcohol on their premises, at all times, without exception. As it was explained to me, there are many cultural, health, legal, and safety reasons for this. One reason, as I recall, was because the leaders of the communities that mission teams are serving, requested it. I am told by other Guatemalans that even the appearance of teams drinking alcohol, on-site or off, is offensive to many religious and community leaders, because alcohol abuse has devastated so many of the indigenous communities in Guatemala. Most evangelical or "Christian" churches and community groups that we are working with preach abstinence of alcohol for this reason. (churches in Guatemala are classified by either Catholic, or Christian/Evangelical. "Christian" is loosely defined as any non-Catholic church, but the majority are conservative, evangelical churches, or community organizations whose leadership is primarily evangelical. Even though we have Catholic team members on our teams, since we are not a "Catholic" mission team sponsored by the Catholic Church, we are often considered to be a "Christian" mission team). Drinking alcohol by volunteers, who are high-profile while visiting Guatemala, even in moderate social settings, I'm told devalues the work of many of our community leaders, and hosts. Regardless of their reasons, we understand and respect that there are probably many reasons, outside of religious beliefs, that the Lutheran Center has those rules that we need to respect and honor, even if we don't agree with them (along with an 11 pm curfew, and other restrictions). After all, this is a mission about serving others' needs, not insisting that they understand and serve ours.

Another reason we ask team members to not consume alcohol during the mission is because we have children, youth, and young adults on our teams, many of whom do not travel with their parents. The legal age for drinking alcohol in Guatemala is 18 years old, but it is rarely, if ever enforced. We do not wish focus on policing our young people, or seeking permission from their parents or legal guardians, as to whether or not they have approval to drink alcohol. How much? When? In the presence of which adults? etc. It is far more logical for us to have a blanket policy of no alcohol, removing any doubt or confusion, and saving our leadership precious time and energy they need to be focused on more important things.

There are also some members of our teams who, for religious reasons, take offense to being in the presence of others drinking alcohol at faith-based events. We draw team members from a wide variety of faith backgrounds, and do our best to be sensitive to their beliefs. Since alcohol is not a vital part of our mission work, this is a simple compromise for the greater good.

Finally, we do not believe this is unreasonable to ask of anyone, of any age, to commit to. This is a short-term mission. Most of our team members are with us for a week. If team members feel the need or desire to drink alcohol in Guatemala, they are welcome to take personal vacation days before or after our mission to do so. However, people who have personal issues with alcohol, or this policy during the mission, are asked to not attend the mission. Once again, I pray for your understanding, patience, grace, and compliance in good faith, and I sincerely apologize for any inconvenience.

Sincerely,
Shawn Smith
Director, Now Is the Time for Missions