**Volunteers in Mission Panama**

**Basic Info.**

Updated Oct. 2012

**Mission:** To inspire, support and undergird the work of IEMPA in Panama through holistic ministry teams ministering to the whole person, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Vision:** Transforming Panama through Christian Love in Action by bridging the global body of Christ.

**Objective:** To provide teams to strategic areas in Panama that help meet the goals of IEMPA and the local churches through holistic ministry teams.

**What is VIM Panama?**

Volunteer in Mission (VIM) Panama is a global mission program of the United Methodist Church located in the country of Panama. It seeks to bridge the global body of Christ through short-term mission volunteers engaging the cultural context of Panama and the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista de Panama (IEMPA).

**How does VIM work in Panama?**

The VIM program exists to serve the needs of IEMPA and the communities it serves. IEMPA establishes the priorities and ask that teams considering working in Panama reflect the desire to support the priorities established by the Panamanian leadership. The Panamanian VIM leadership team will match the needs and priorities along with the team make-up. We ask that teams remain open to being placed where needed most according to these priorities.

**Best Practices:**

We highly recommend that teams observe the following UMVIM “best practices”:

* Have a trained team leader.
* Register team with UMVIM in your district.
* Provide appropriate insurance.
* Include spiritual formation

You can find more information, links and resources at [www.missionvolunteers.org](http://www.missionvolunteers.org)

**Teams:** volunteers who work alongside IEMPA are:

Construction Environmental

Medical/Dental Church Development/Other

***Construction***

Construction projects range from repair, remodeling to new construction. Teams may be involved in masonry work, plumbing, carpentry, electrical work, roofing, and general construction. Your team will work alongside a local foreman. Other professionals (electricians, plumbers, etc.) may be hired as needed.

***Medical:***The Methodist Church in Panama realizes that health care is a major priority for the communities served by its component churches, to serve both members of the congregations and the people of the surrounding community. A focus of that priority includes the welcoming and support of UMVIM health care teams including medical, dental, and optical as well as health education. The long term health care focus of the church is the development of sustainable, holistic health care ministry to the marginalized and indigenous populations of Panama.

**IMPORTANT:** Doctors, dentists and nurses will need to submit **notarized** copies of current license and professional school diploma along with a color copy of passports and a brief one-page professional resume before coming on a medical mission. Additionally, we need a list of all team members and their passport numbers and a manifest of all medicines being brought in to the country indicating the expiration date and lot number of each item. These will need to be received approx 2 months prior to your team’s arrival date. The documents may be sent via UPS, DHL or FED Ex (but not by USPS Express Mail) to the following address:

Iglesia Evangelica Metodista de Panama

Via Espana y Calle Martin Luther King (IPA)

Casa # 19  Las Sabanas

Ciudad de Panama

Republic of Panama

Tel. /FAX 011-507- 224-5184

Please notify Rev. Rhett Thompson when documents are sent.

Health Care Teams are responsible for providing **everything** they need to run a clean clinic.

Authorized gleaning from US clinics and hospitals is an excellent way to get these supplies at no cost. Several nonprofit agencies specialize in collecting, packaging and shipping these supplies. They basically charge only for shipping and handling. See: http://umvim4health.blogspot.com/p/medical-supply-links.html

Expired meds are **never** allowed in the country. If you choose to prepackage medications before arrival, please bring along one of the empty containers so that expiration may be verified. Also place a list of all medications and the expiration date in the suitcase as well. The team leader should also carry a list of all medications and their expiration dates that are in each bag.

At the end of your week, we ask for detailed records to be provided at the end of each trip for reporting and follow-up purposes. A Medical/Dental follow-up form will be provided to you.

We also have available a fully equipped dental clinic located in the community center in Cienaguita.

**Assessments and Environmental teams:** Community assessments still need to be conducted in various locations where we serve to give us better understanding of the contextual needs. Doing this assists us greatly in knowing the needs of the community, the types of teams we need and focus areas of ministry. We do these assessments with VIM teams. All assessment forms are provided and are bilingual for ease of use.

Assessments are conducted through interviews and an analysis of the data collected can be conducted by both Panamanian staff as well as team members. The findings will be compiled in the form of a report that summarizes the findings by the team. We will post the results of those assessments so that teams will have an opportunity to review the particular concerns of the people of our various service areas.

**Church Development/Other**: We encourage a variety of options for teams to engage in training and strengthening the local church. Many members of UMVIM teams come prepared with activities for kids in the community in addition to their tasks. Examples: VBS, drama, music and other creative expressions of the gospel.

**What’s involved?**

1. Make Initial Contact 5. Other Costs
2. Scheduling 6. Processing Payments
3. Lodging 7. Food Costs
4. Transportation 8. Construction Costs

9. Sightseeing

1. **Make Initial Contact**

It is recommended that you contact either Rev. Rhett Thompson or Cindy Ceballos initially to discuss your interest in bringing a team to Panama. They can provide you with current needs and information on team formation and locations. From here, you will be directed to the next step.

1. **Scheduling:** One of the first steps in planning a mission trip is to contact the UMVIM coordinators with the following: [*PanamaMissionRJT@gmail.com*](mailto:PanamaMissionRJT@gmail.com)

The team’s preferred dates and the type of work that the mission team is offering to help with. The pastoral/missionary staff of IEMPA confirms the dates (or suggests alternative dates), and assigns a worksite according to the needs in Panama*.*

*Note: The Pastoral/Missionary Staff of the United Methodist Mission Church of Panama has a prioritized list of needs and makes all decisions about work locations for UMVIM teams.*

*This Pastoral/Missionary Staff matches a team’s skills, size, and dates to the appropriate project, taking into account constantly evolving priorities.*

*Occasionally, it is necessary for the local staff to change the destination site for an UMVIM team before they arrive. It is always a decision of last resort, but can happen for a variety of reasons. If a change is required, we try to give the team as much warning as possible.*

Approx. 2 months before your arrival date, we will send you a Data Sheet. Please fill this out and get it to your coordinator as soon as possible. This will allow us to begin making your reservations.

1. **Lodging*:***
2. Panama City
   1. Lodging at IEMPA main office (on arrival and departure, when available)

Room # 1: 8 beds (4 bunk beds)

Room # 2: 12 beds (6 bunk beds)

Room # 3: 4 beds (2 bunk beds)

Rooms are air conditioned and have showers with lukewarm water. There is access to a swimming pool.

1. Interior of the country
2. Camp Cielito in El Espino, District of San Carlos (2 hours from Panama City)

5 cabins, each with 8 bunk beds, full bathroom facilities

1. Cienaguita Community Center in eastern Chiriqui (6 hours from PC)

Four large rooms with a total of 25 cots with foam pads. Full bathroom and laundry facilities

1. Volcan Training Center in highland Chiriqui: (9 hours from PC)

Two dorms with 30 beds each (triple bunks), two rooms with 2 single beds in each room. Full bathroom and laundry facilities

1. Santiago, Veraguas, Teams will stay in hotels as IEMPA housing is not available.

We have linens and towels at the Panama City lodging. Sheets and towels must be brought to all other sites. We accept a donation of $3.00 per person per night in all church lodging to cover laundry and other expenses.

We can make reservations for teams at hotels, if necessary.

Hotels in the interior of the country average $45.00 for doubles.

1. Hotel in David:
2. Hotel Puerta Del Sol [www.hotelpuertadelsol.com.pa](http://www.hotelpuertadelsol.com.pa)
3. Internacional Hotel [www.hotelinternacionalchiriqui.com](http://www.hotelinternacionalchiriqui.com)
4. Hotel in Santiago:
5. Hotel Gran David
6. Hotels in Panama City:
7. B&B La Estancia [www.bedandbreakfastpanama.com](http://www.bedandbreakfastpanama.com) Doubles: $82.50 (Located near the national airport.)
8. Hotel Riande Aeropuerto [www.riandehoteles.com](http://www.riandehoteles.com) Doubles: $132 (Located near the international airport and has a free shuttle to the airport. Price includes a buffet breakfast.)

4. **Transportation**:

IEMPA provides a 30 passenger coaster and assigns a driver. Each VIM team covers cost of fuel, tolls, driver’s fees and meals and lodging for driver. If working away from church provided housing, the team will also be responsible for staff meals and lodging. There will be $500.00 bus usage charge to offset the cost that the church has incurred in the bus purchase and maintenance.

1. Bus driver fees: *are: (charge is for entire group, not individuals)*
2. *Daily fee $20.00*
3. *Trip fee to Camp Cielito: $50.00*
4. *Trip fee to Santiago $75.00*
5. *Trip fee to Chiriqui $100.00*
6. Air transportation to Chiriqui:
7. $228.00 roundtrip, $114.00 one way
8. Each passenger is entitled to carry 30 pounds of luggage.
9. Reservations and payment can be made directly to the airline:
10. Air Panamá [www.flyairpanama.com](http://www.flyairpanama.com) (Tel.001-507-316-9000)

Airport exit Tax. This is included in the cost of your airline ticket.

**5. Other Costs:**

*Once the location of your worksite is determined, there may be additional costs incurred specific to your worksite. You will be provided a cost calculator spread sheet to assist you in estimating your approximate costs for your trip.*

1. Tips for luggage handlers: 50 cents a bag, $1 for oversized bags. It is generally preferable to pay the tip as a group to the captain of the luggage handlers who will then distribute to the other workers. That helps to avoid both overpayments and duplicate payments.
2. Translators: The translators are paid $10.00/day. We will always attempt to find local translators so that your team will not be out the expense for lodging for translators. Please let your coordinator know approximately how many translators your team will require.
3. Laundry Service varies but is inexpensive near all of our locations. Cienaguita and Volcan have services onsite.

**6. Processing Payment**

We ask construction teams to send payment for materials so that we have it in hand in Panama *30 days* before the team's arrival date. This payment should include your construction and bus fee excluding fuel as this will vary. This makes it possible to purchase materials and supplies before the team arrives. Hotels and restaurants will not take checks. You may bring cash or credit cards for hotels, restaurants, fuel, tips and incidentals.

Remember to notify your credit card company before you travel that you will be making purchases in Panama. Your method of sending money should be by check or money order to:

**Iglesia Evangelica Metodista de Panama**

**Apartado 0816-03025**

**Panama, Republic of Panama**

**Please indicate on check: team name and location of service.**

**7. Food Costs**

At some sites, we are able to prepare food during the work week.

The team should budget the following:

**Cook** & **Helper**: $20.00 each, daily

**Groceries**: 12.00 per team member per day

On travel days or other times the team eats out, you should budget the following:

**Restaurant** **meals**: $12.00 per person per meal (aprox.)

**8.** **Construction Costs**

For most construction projects we ask for a minimum donation of $200 per team member to cover the cost of both materials and labor. On some projects, teams try to raise enough money to completely finish a phase or an entire building.

**9. Sightseeing:** Learning about the Panamanian culture is an important part of the VIM program. Therefore, at least one day of sightseeing should be included as an integral part of the experience. The church will provide a volunteer to accompany your team on tours. It is best to have a full day available to see Panama City. Any or all of the following may be included in the itinerary:

1. The ruins of Old Panama ($6 adults, $5 senior citizens, $3 students)
2. Colonial Panama, includes the Church of the Golden Altar ($1) and the Presidential Palace
3. The Panama Canal ($15)
4. Handicraft Center, includes items from all the major Indian groups as well as other crafts.
5. Las Tinajas Restaurant, includes a typical Panamanian dinner ($25) and a floor show of folkloric dancers ($5)
6. Summit Botanical Park ($2), in the heart of a tropical jungle, includes a small zoo of tropical birds, reptiles and mammals

The per person admission price is indicated in parenthesis. Prices may vary very slightly. The church bus and driver will be available for use during the tour under the same terms as mentioned above.

For teams with a little more time, there are other possible side trips within a couple hours of Panama City, such as El Valle de Anton, in the mountains, Taboga Island, which can be reached by ferry, and several beautiful beaches along both the Pacific Coast and the Atlantic (Caribbean) Coast.

For teams that will be working in the Province of Chiriqui, time should be reserved for a tour of mountain communities of Boquete, Volcan and Cerro Punta. Often that can be done after attending Sunday worship.

**FAQ’s**

**Passports and Immunization**:·You need a valid U.S. passport to enter Panama. Tourist visas are no longer required. *Passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the date of your departure from the US.*

Immunizations are not required, but are recommended. Check with an international travel clinic in your area, or your health care provider. Malaria treatment is recommended based on the area that you will be working. Please refer to the CDC Traveler’s Health site for more info. <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationPanama.aspx>

**Medical Care**: medical care available in Panama. In most clinics and hospitals, payment may be made by credit card as well as cash. We highly recommend that all groups take advantage of the medical insurance offered through UMVIM.  ([www.missionvolunteers.org](http://www.missionvolunteers.org)) Medical services are much cheaper than in the U.S., though medicines themselves may be more expensive. Pharmacies generally accept credit cards as well.

**Water:** Tap water in Panama is of generally high quality in the urban areas. It may be safely consumed. However, bottled water is widely available if you so choose. We have coolers and ice chests for VIM use.

**Clothing:** Short pants, short sleeve or sleeveless shirts are acceptable attire for both men and women. Dress for church is casual, though it would be preferable not to wear shorts to church. Pants are acceptable attire for women even at church services.

**Exchange Rate:** The official currency of Panama is the Balboa which is on par with the dollar. However, Panama has no paper currency of its own, so even though prices are listed in balboas, the currency actually used is the dollar. Panama does have coins which are the same size and value of US coins. Both may be used in Panamá

**Electrical Power:** 110 just like in the USA.

**Cell phones:** We provide a cell phone for the teams use. Prepaid cards may be purchased according to need. This is much less expensive than use of USA based cell phones. Average cost of calls to USA: 10 cents per minute. Note: Cell phones in Panama have eight digits. UMVIM Team phone number: 011-507-6762-7393, calling direct from USA.

**Toilets Facilities:** All sites have access to sanitary toilets. Please note that all wastepaper must be placed in the waste baskets NOT the toilets.

**Contact Info:** Church Website: [**www.iempanama.com**](http://www.iempanama.com) Main Church office: 011-507-224-5184

Panama UMVIM Scheduling Coordinator: Rev.Rhett Thompson

Phone: 011-507-6618-2633 FAX: 011-507-226-3814

E-mail: [**PanamaMissionRJT@gmail.com**](mailto:PanamaMissionRJT@gmail.com)

Rhett’s Website: [**www.rhettthompson.weebly.com**](http://www.rhettthompson.weebly.com)

Santiago, Veraguas Pastor and Construction Coordinator: Rev.David Ceballos

Phone: 011-6947-9306

Magic Jack:

E-mail: [**Bumice2000@yahoo.com**](mailto:Bumice2000@yahoo.com)

Santiago, Veraguas- Health Coordinator: Cindy Ceballos BSN, CDE

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