

Preparation Guidelines

Sister Parish South to North Delegations

FOR NORTHERN CHURCH

- **Propose dates for the delegation**, based on availability of Sister Parish staff, Southern community, and people who will be part of the delegation at your church. **20 months beforehand**
 - It's usually good to do a South to North delegation after a couple North to South delegations have taken place in a new relationship.
 - Sister Parish only does 2-3 South to North delegations each year, on a first come first served basis, due to financial costs and staffing limitations.
 - Recommended length of the South-North Delegations is 7-8 days, including travel days. 4-6 delegates are usually invited. If you would like to do a delegation that is longer (10-12 days), the staff person will need some support with interpretation during the delegation and it may be good to plan some relaxing activities in the middle of the week.
 - Both communities need to understand that it is incredibly difficult for people in Guatemala and El Salvador to get a visa to visit the U.S., even if we do everything correctly. An invitation from the U.S. church and support from Sister Parish help the delegates, but according to U.S. law the burden is on the individual applicant to prove to the Embassy that he/she will return to their home country (and the Embassy is mostly looking at economic factors, which make this requirement very challenging for economically poor Sister Parish communities). We believe that the South to North delegations are central to our mission, so, in spite of the challenges, we are committed to working with the U.S. churches and southern communities through this process.
 - Staff if available for answering any questions you might have. If visas are not granted on the first try, staff and the two communities involved will decide how to proceed. It can be helpful to start these conversations about alternative options early in the process.
 - Wait time for a visa appointment can be up to 6-18 months. Staff and the Southern community need an additional 3-5 months to prepare before asking for the appointment.
- Determine who will be the **main contact person** for setting up the delegation and let Sister Parish staff know. Determine the best way to create and update the timeline with target dates for key steps in the process (Google calendar, email, etc.) **20 months before the proposed delegation dates**
- Sister Parish staff will send the [Preparation guidelines for South to North Delegation](#) (this document) to the main contact person.
- Write a **formal letter of invitation** to the Southern community. See [sample letter \(A\)](#) at the end of this document. Include how many people will be invited and possible dates, and hopes and goals for the delegation and the relationship. **18 months before delegation**
- Send in **\$500 deposit** to reserve dates. **18 months before delegation**
 - Sister Parish Financial Office: P.O. Box 5202, Fargo, ND 58105
 - Written to "Sister Parish, Inc." with "Delegation" in the memo line

- At this time, the Southern community will begin the process of selecting delegates. Each community or Sister Parish committee in the south has their own process for choosing delegates. This can take quite a bit of time and often involves multiple meetings with staff.
- Sister Parish staff will send the **first billing** for the delegation, which includes passport costs, the costs of soliciting a US visa, as well as the orientation, lodging, and travel associated with obtaining those items. **17 months before delegation**
 - Sister Parish financial office: P.O. Box 5202, Fargo, ND 58105. "Delegation" in the memo line.
 - When Sister Parish staff has the funds, they can begin the visa application process. This should begin **16 months before** the travel dates.
- Create a first **draft of the agenda** for the delegation. See [sample agenda \(D\)](#) at the end of this document. This will be submitted to the Embassy with the visa applications. This does not need to be a finalized agenda, but should include activities that are set (like worship), as well as potential activities. Once we know which delegates have visas, staff will consult them about their agenda priorities too. **17 months before delegation**
 - The first activity in the agenda should be orientation and introductions
 - Avoid over-scheduling days. Take into account that delegations (north and south) always run behind. Activities that usually take 1 hour will take 2 hours due to interpretation.
 - It is important that delegates have time to relax and talk with one another without translation. The agenda should include at least an hour each day for delegates to relax and reflect with staff.
 - Keep in mind the shared goals that both communities expressed for the delegation in planning the agenda.
 - Look for ways to connect the delegates to as many of your church's missions and ministries as possible.
 - Please avoid scheduling activities too late in the evening, particularly if the delegates are from a rural area where families usually go to sleep early.
- Prepare the necessary **paperwork for soliciting visas**. Please exchange drafts of these documents with staff so we can make sure all of the paperwork is in order. **17 months before delegation**
 - *Establish main church contact* - Choose a contact person who will also sign the formal invitation letter and whose contact will be listed on the application. This needs to be someone that personally knows people in your partner community. Ideally this would be the pastor/priest/reverend at your church, if they have traveled. If that is not possible, choose someone from the Sister Parish committee.
 - *Reach out to ask for Congressional letters of support* – We recommend contacting your congressional representatives early in the process to ask if they are willing to write a letter and if so, what they need. Many offices require privacy releases signed by the delegates and/or additional biographical information about the delegates. This can take time for staff to compile. See [sample letter of congressional support \(B\)](#) at the end of this document.
 - *Formal letter of invitation* – Staff will send you the full names, birthdates, and passport numbers of the delegates. This information, as well as the exact delegation dates, needs to be included in the letter. See [sample letter of congressional support \(C\)](#) at the end of this document.

- *Draft agenda* – Email staff the latest version, preferably on church letterhead or in a format in which staff can add the Sister Parish logo. See [sample agenda \(D\)](#) at the end of this document.
 - *Draft budget* – With staff, create a draft budget for the delegation that can be submitted with the other materials, preferably on your church's letterhead or with the Sister Parish logo. See [sample budget \(E\)](#) at the end of this document.
 - A letter of support from Sister Parish Inc., a letter of support from the Southern church, and other documents proving that the delegates plan to return to Guatemala or El Salvador after the trip, will also be submitted to the Embassy.
- With the above information, staff will solicit the **visa interview appointment**, but the date is set by the local U.S. Consulate and the wait time can range from 6-36 months. **Steps for your church once the interview date is confirmed:**
- *Send finalized Congressional letters of support to staff* – As soon as you have the interview date, you can contact your Congressional representatives who agreed to write a letter to request the final version. If possible, send a PDF version to staff so the delegates can bring it to their interview.
 - *Prepare the main contact and receptionists at your church and the U.S. contact* – The Embassy may contact the church to verify the delegation. In our experience, **if the U.S. Embassy reaches out** to verify the invitation, they usually contact the church directly to ask: 1) If this delegation is happening and, if so, when; 2) Who is traveling and do you know them; 3) Who is paying; 4) What other organizations are involved.
 - *Fax the Embassy your documents a few days before the interview date* – Include your formal invitation letter addressed to the Embassy, the delegation agenda and the budget (be sure these are the same versions that staff submitted with the visa applications). The fax cover sheet can include the date and time of the appointment and a request for due consideration.
- After the visa interviews, we will know immediately who has received a visa, but staff or delegates will need to pick them up 1-5 business days after the interview. As soon as the visas are secured, **the northern community can buy the plane tickets** for the delegates and Sister Parish staff accompanier. The second billing for the delegation will include money for **travel/lodging within Guatemala, simple emergency, and health insurance**. Staff will purchase the insurance, but please talk to us about preferred options. We have bought insurance for Central American delegates and staff through TrawickInternational.com and insurance for U.S. citizen staff members through WorldNomads.com, but we are open to other options. Please send the flight and insurance information to the Sister Parish staff person. **2-4 months before delegation**
- Once the list of delegates with visas is finalized, **staff will share the agenda with the delegates** and ask for their requested activities and priorities. Please send an updated version of the agenda, along with any questions or options you would like to pose to the delegates. **2-4 months before delegation**

- Staff will send the **second billing 2-4 months before** the delegation, which includes the Sister Parish program fee (\$1,000), the staff stipend (\$500), travel to and from the airport, food en route, etc.
 - Send the check to the Sister Parish Financial Office: P.O. Box 5202, Fargo, ND 58105 **at least 10 weeks before the delegation.**

- Begin looking for **host families. 2-3 months before delegation**
 - We recommend 2-3 days in each home-stay.
 - We recommend the delegates be placed in homestays as pairs or small groups so they have someone with whom they can speak their native language.
 - Hosting can be a great way to involve people who are new to Sister Parish or have been involved but unable to travel south.
 - Remind host families and other parishioners that in an effort to stay true to the mission of Sister Parish, **gifts should not be given** or exchanged with individuals, besides small non-monetary ones that have mainly sentimental value. We encourage giving a gift that the whole community can use or enjoy: banners, a communion cup or plate, etc. (As we get closer to the dates, staff will send a document with [Guidelines for hosting delegates from the south](#) to share with the host families and others who will be involved in the delegation).
 - Plan **a meeting with the host families** in which people who have hosted or traveled south before can share about their experiences and give a heads up on some of the cultural differences **1 month before the delegation**. Sister Parish staff would be happy to arrange to Zoom or call into this meeting if you would like. Just let us know!

- Working with the delegates and Sister Parish staff, **finalize the agenda**. In the meantime, staff will be carrying out orientation sessions with the delegates to help prepare them for the experience. **1-2 months before the delegation**

- Provide a **letter addressed to U.S. Customs and Border Protection** that the delegates can carry with them on their travel day. The letter can be very similar to the letter sent to the Embassy – just update the list of delegates who are traveling (if different from the list that applied for visas) and the language about what you are asking (instead of asking the Embassy to grant a visa, you are asking the border agents to allow or welcome the delegates into the country). See [sample letter \(F\)](#) at the end of this document. **2-4 weeks before travel**

- With staff, establish a **communication plan for the delegates' travel day**. Who can communicate with staff in the event of itinerary changes or emergencies and what is the best way to communicate?

- Get ready for a great visit and enjoy this exciting opportunity to share your lives, culture and spirituality with your brothers and sisters.

Please reach out to your Sister Parish staff person at any point throughout this process with questions or assistance you may need! We are grateful to you for your time and efforts to make this delegation possible. It is an important way to maintain the relationship you have with your brothers and sisters in the South!

See our website for other helpful information: www.sisterparish.org

The purpose of both south-to-north and north-to-south delegation visits is similar: To raise consciousness about each other's reality; to increase the sense of solidarity; to experience ecumenism; to bring about reconciliation; and to strengthen the community-to-community relationship.

A) SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Danville Congregational CHURCH

September 27, 2012

San Antonio Sister Parish Partnership Committee
San Antonio, Quiche, Guatemala
C/O Sister Parish
6 Ave 2-22
Zona 2
Guatemala City, Guatemala

Dear Pedro and Committee Members,

It gives us great pleasure to invite a delegation of 6 people from San Antonio to visit our church, Danville Congregational Church, and our community of Danville, California, USA, for an educational exchange. The purpose of both south-to-north and north-to-south visits is to raise consciousness about each others' reality; to increase the sense of solidarity, to experience ecumenism; and to bring about reconciliation- in general- to strengthen the hermanamiento.

We would like to have you visit for about 8 days sometime during 2013 or 2014. We look to your community to suggest the time of year that will work best for you, and then to suggest some dates to the Danville Congregational Church Sister Parish Committee. We will work with you to choose final dates for your visit.

We look forward to working together to plan activities at the church and in the local community, and to choose educational side trips to share the "realities" of our Northern world. These might include some or all of the following: Shared worship service, pot luck social, small group dinners at host families, visit to Dayspring preschool or other local school, host family activity such as attending a child's soccer game, visit to sustainable organic farm such as Tera Bella Family Farm, or a service project such as packing food at the food bank.

The members of Danville Congregational Church are excited to extend to you the "Extravagant Welcome" that Christ taught us to offer. We know we can learn from each other and deepen our relationship through this exchange.

Thank you for considering this visit. We look forward to working closely with you to make it possible.

Sincerely,

B) SAMPLE LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM CONGRESS

RICHARD J. DURBIN

ILLINOIS

ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1504

July 10, 2013

Consul General
United States Embassy-Guatemala City
Guatemala City, Guatemala

Dear Consular Chief,

My constituent, Barbara Ehst, has recently contacted my Chicago office regarding her desire to obtain nonimmigrant visas for five Guatemalan women from the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City. The First United Methodist Church of Downers Grove has invited the women to visit the church, meet the congregation, and explore the Chicagoland area.

Their details are as follows:

[Insert Names, Birthdays, Passport numbers for all delegates]

The women will be accompanied by Brian Tyler, the Guatemala Regional Coordinator for Sister Parish and housed with families from the church. Four delegations from Downers Grove have visited Guatemala and this will be the second group visiting from the Central American country.

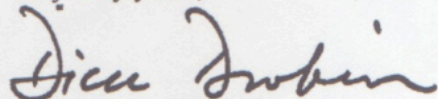
I have been assured that they have no intention of immigrating to the United States, and have firm evidence to show that they have strong ties to their home country.

I would ask that you please give this case every consideration under Department of State guidelines.

If you have further questions, please contact, Tran Nguyen, a Senate Aide who assists me in such matters, in my Chicago office at (312)353.4952.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,



Richard J. Durbin

C) SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EMBASSY (On church letterhead)



A Reconciling
Congregation

Wallingford United Methodist Church

2115 N. 42nd Street, Seattle, WA 98103

(206) 547-6945

April 30, 2017

Embajada de Los Estados Unidos
Boulevard Santa Elena Final
Antiguo Cuscatlán, La Libertad
El Salvador

To Whom it May Concern,

We write on behalf of the five members of our Sister Parish community of Guarjila, Chalatenango, El Salvador, whom we have invited to visit our church community in Seattle, WA from September 21 through October 2, 2017. A staff person for Sister Parish, Inc. will accompany the delegation as an interpreter and coordinator for this trip. *[Include full name, DOB and passport number of staff person, if known]*

Wallingford United Methodist Church (WUMC) formally joined Sister Parish, Inc. in 1999 and since then we have had nine delegations travel from Seattle to Guarjila, establishing a warm, cooperative relationship based on the sharing of our lives, our culture, and our faith. In our time together, we have also hosted three delegations from Guarjila to Seattle. We find that these south to north delegations are some of the most important moments for our faith communities. Hosting these delegations allows us to reciprocate the generous hospitality given to groups from Seattle and gives congregants who cannot travel to El Salvador a chance to participate in this relationship.

Sister Parish, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that fosters relationships between U.S. and Central American faith communities. Since 1989, Sister Parish, Inc. has provided accompaniment to over *[Insert updated number]* delegations between partnered church communities and has never failed to return all delegates to their country of origin at the end of each delegation. All of the applicants have significant ties to El Salvador that will ensure their return on October 2, 2017.

WUMC will cover all expenses for the delegates to visit our church.

The five individuals requesting single-entry non-immigrant B1 tourist visas to participate in the Guarjila Sister Parish delegation are:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Passport #</u>	<u>Date of Birth</u>
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[Include names, passport numbers and DOBs for all applicants]

Sincerely,

[Include signature]

Rev. Ann Berney
Lead Pastor, Wallingford UMC
pastor@wallingfordumc.org
(206) 547-6945 - office

Rev. Ann Berney
Pastor

Louis Magor
Music Director

Mary Edwards
Barb Bash
Lay Leaders

Carrie Cates
Office Manager

D) SAMPLE AGENDA *(On church letterhead or with SP logo)*

Delegation Itinerary

Tierra Nueva 2 Sister Parish Delegation to Saint Joan of Arc

August 14-24, 2015 in Minneapolis, Minnesota



Friday, August 14

PM Arrival
 Orientation with Sister Parish Saint Joan of Arc group and host families
 Host family time

Saturday, August 15

8:00 AM Morning with host families
1:00 PM Meeting with Sister Parish Committee at Saint Joan of Arc
3:45 PM Prayer and reflection
5:00 PM Mass at Saint Joan of Arc
6:00 PM Dinner with host families

Sunday, August 16

9:00/11:00 Mass with host families
 Reception after mass at Saint Joan of Arc
PM Host family time
5:30-8:30 PM Community welcome party/potluck in Hospitality Hall
8:30 PM Host family time

Monday, August 17

8:30 AM Arrive at Saint Joan of Arc
10:30 AM Mass at Native American Church in Minneapolis
1:00 PM Visit Cathedral, reflection at Harriet Island
6:00 PM Dinner and meeting at Casa Guadalupe, non-profit serving Latino families
8:15 PM Prayer
8:30 PM Host Family Time

Tuesday, August 18

8:15 AM Mass at Saint Joan of Arc
8:30 AM Leave for visit to lake cabin, overnight group activities planned at cabin

Wednesday, August 19

12:30 PM Return from cabin
4:00 PM Meeting with peace march organizers and members of SJA
5:00 PM Peace march
6:30 PM Dinner and Bible Study with Saint Joan of Arc members (Luke 13:22-30)
9:30 PM Time with host families

Thursday, August 20

8:00 AM Mass and Breakfast with Father Jim DeBruycker
10:30 AM Visit Casa Esperanza, women's rights organization
12:30 PM Lunch at the Global Market
2:00 PM Reflection at Saint Joan of Arc
3:00 PM Prepare and serve food for homeless population with Mobile Loaves and Fishes
6:15 PM Dinner, prayer and reflection
7:30 PM Time with new host families

Friday, August 21

8:00 AM Time with host families
2:00 PM Meeting with Melvin Carter, Minnesota Department of Education
4:00 PM Reflection
6:00 PM Host family time or optional visit to Science Museum

Saturday, August 22

9:00 AM Arrive at Saint Joan of Arc
9:00 - 11:30 Meet to finalize delegates' presentation for mass
11:30 - 1:00 Lunch
1:00 - 4:00 Retreat with Saint Joan of Arc parishioners
4:00 - 5:30 Reflection
5:30 PM Host family time

Sunday, August 23

9:00/11:00 Mass at Saint Joan of Arc – Delegates present at both masses
10:00 - 11:00 Reception on mall between masses
12:00 - 12:30 Reception on mall after mass
12:30 - 4:30 Host family time
4:30 - 5:30 Reflection
5:30-8:30 Community farewell party/potluck
8:30 PM Host family time

Monday, August 24

AM Goodbye at airport – Delegates and Sister Parish Coordinator return to Guatemala

E) SAMPLE BUDGET *(On church letterhead or with SP logo)*



Delegation Budget

San José la Montaña Sister Parish Delegation

(Hermanamiento SJM Group)

to Trinity Episcopal Church, Newtown, CT

October 21-31, 2016

Income:

Donor pledges and fundraising events	\$800.00
Available funds	\$10,100.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$10,900.00

Expenses:

Trip preparation and travel in El Salvador	\$2,275.00
Sister Parish program fees	\$1,500.00
Airfare	\$5,250.00
Travelers Insurance	\$350.00
Honorariums	\$200.00
Restaurants	\$300.00
Day trip to New York City	\$980.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$10,855.00

Note: Delegates will stay in parishioners homes and hosts will donate travel costs in the U.S. (pick-up and drop-off from the airport, rides to the church, meals, etc.)

F) SAMPLE LETTER TO U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER CONTROL

(On church letterhead)

September 8, 2016

United States Customs and Border Protection

To Whom It May Concern,

First Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minnesota has invited a delegation of three people from our “sister parish” community San Antonio Los Ranchos in the department of Chalatenango, El Salvador, to visit Duluth from **September 27 – October 6, 2016 for a religious and cultural exchange facilitated by Sister Parish, Inc.** Sister Parish Director *[Include Name, Date of birth, and passport number of staff]* will accompany the group as an interpreter and guide. **First Lutheran Church will cover all of the delegation’s travel expenses** (plane tickets, housing, meals, transportation, and other costs incurred during their visit).

The relationship between First Lutheran and the community of San Antonio Los Ranchos began in 1998 when a delegation of seven traveled from Duluth to Los Ranchos. Since then there have been seven other delegations from Duluth and two delegations from Los Ranchos to Duluth. While visiting here, the delegation will participate in spiritual and cultural activities designed to bring our communities together.

[Include Names, Birthdays, and passport numbers for all delegates]

The goal of Sister Parish Inc. is to foster relationships between churches in the U.S. and communities in Guatemala and El Salvador. Over a period of 25 years Sister Parish Inc. has provided accompaniment to over *[Include updated number]* delegations from Central American countries to the U.S. and all participants have returned to their home countries when the delegation was over. At the Sister Parish website (www.sisterparish.org), you can find information regarding delegations, activities, and the positive relationships that have been established.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your help in expediting our guests’ arrival in the United States and welcoming them into our country.

Sincerely,

[Include name, title, signature and contact information]