Latin American Cultural and Safety Issues

Dress Code

In Latin America, members of Christian communities tend to dress more conservatively. Our work will be compromised if we do not follow a similar dress code. Our goal is not to push the boundaries, but to make clothing a non-issue in our work. Latin Americans sometimes have the conception that young people in the U.S. are sexually loose by the clothing choices and sexual decisions they make – as seen in American TV shows and movies. Therefore please adhere to the following dress code:

For Men & Women:

- No exposed tattoos.
- No white t-shirts without a logo - most Latin Americans consider this underwear.

Men

- No earrings or piercings of any kind.
- No tank tops or shirts off – shoulders should be covered at all times.
- Men wear pants in Latin America. Shorts are for sleeping, swimming and soccer.
- Never wear hats in church buildings or during religious programs.

Women

- All shorts and skirts must be below the knees, not at your knees.
- Tank tops and sleeveless tops are not appropriate in public. Shoulders must be covered at all times. Sleeveless sundresses are appropriate if a t-shirt is worn underneath.
- Women should make sure that skirts, pants, and tops are not "see-through".
- It is not appropriate to have any bra or underwear showing.
- Women should not wear clothing that allows their stomach, back, or cleavage to be shown, even when they stretch and move around. This is not considered appropriate in Latin American countries.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Illegal Drugs

Notre Dame Immersion trips are alcohol and tobacco free. Many Church members in Latin America believe that consuming alcohol and tobacco is contrary to being a Christian. Alcohol must not be possessed or consumed at any time during the immersion trip, including days off. Our purpose on an Immersion trip is to serve, not to challenge the belief system of our hosts. In the rare case that a participant needs to smoke, the following rules should be followed: 1. Never smoke on church/orphanage property. 2. Never smoke in a place where you can be seen by anyone.

Illegal drugs are prohibited at all times. Possession of illegal drugs in Latin America can get you thrown into prison. This would be a very unpleasant experience to say the

least. There is very little that representatives of Notre Dame could do on your behalf and you would be at the mercy of the host country's legal system.

Photography and Video

Photographs and videos should not be taken until the second half of each trip when proper relationships have been developed. Use discretion when posting pictures of children and other Latin Americans on the internet.

Personal Interactions

With Latin Americans

- Romantic relationships with the people we are serving are strictly forbidden.
- Flirtatiousness by female team members toward Latin American males is often interpreted as a serious sexual advance. This can lead to serious consequences for our group.
- Flirtatiousness by male team members toward Latin American females is often interpreted as a prelude to a serious relationship (i.e. Marriage). This can complicate our group's work with the local people.
- In general, it is best for our team members to build friendships with people of the same sex. This is particularly true when we are working with Latin American adolescents.
- Touching nationals of the opposite sex over the age of 10 is discouraged. This can easily be misinterpreted. Young children can be hugged, but it is best by someone of the same sex.
- It is appropriate to shake people's hands no matter what gender.

With other Immersion Team Members

- Excessive touch between males and females is not looked upon positively by Latin American Christians. Male and female team members should not hug or kiss in public.

Work Projects

Every Immersion team member is expected to work to the best of his/her ability and to be self-motivated. Know your limits. Safety is the number one priority on work sites. Only work with tools that you know how to use in a safe manner. Never play around at a work site. Only lift what you can carry comfortably. Only volunteer for jobs you have been shown how to do properly and safely.

Work projects must be completed according to the wishes of the local people, not the mission team. Often a work project will be organized and constructed in ways that are not familiar to us. Be willing to build it the "Latin American" way. Work projects are often changed unexpectedly at the last minute for many different reasons. Frustration

with not having enough to do for all group members is common. Flexibility is required of all Immersion team members.

Remember that people are more important than work projects. Often pastors, neighbors and children will want to help in a work project. Take time to get to know people. They care more about relationships than accomplishments. Do not feel the need to finish the big project. Most projects cannot be completed in one week and Latin Americans are comfortable with unfinished projects.

Safety Issues

It is not safe for people unfamiliar with the area, language and culture to go anywhere alone. When going off-site, stay in groups of four or more. At least one male should always accompany females. Never leave a site without obtaining permission from the group leader.

If you are lost, stay in the location where you were last with the group. When the Immersion leaders realize you are lost they will go looking for you. Stay in a visible location. Do not go into a person's home for help.

Do not leave anything valuable in the vehicles at any time, unless that is your only option, or the vehicle will be in plain sight at all times. Vehicle break-ins are common in Latin America.

Authority of the Group Leaders

There are issues that may not be covered in this document which are completely up to the discretion of the group leaders. These issues may include but are not limited to: curfews, scheduling issues, work assignments, and activity choices. The group leaders have authority to make decisions for the Immersion team and its individual members. Insubordination causes disunity and confusion and will not be tolerated.