

Mercy Volunteer Corps

International Handbook



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MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK

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MISSION STATEMENT

In partnership with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, lay women and men of Mercy Volunteer Corps (MVC), enter into relationship with people who are economically poor and marginalized. In a spirit of mutuality, volunteers cultivate mercy and justice in the world by embracing compassionate service, social justice, spirituality and a simple lifestyle in community.

MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marian Uba, Executive Director

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MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS STAFF

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John Farley, Recruitment and Publications Coordinator

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DIRECTION STATEMENT OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY OF THE AMERICAS

Animated by the Gospel and Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor, we, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, are impelled to commit our lives and resources to act in solidarity with

- the economically poor of the world, especially women and children;
- women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society;
- one another as we embrace our multicultural and international reality.

This commitment will impel us to:

- develop and act from a multicultural, international perspective;
- speak with a corporate voice;
- work for systemic change;
- practice non-violence;
- act in harmony and interdependence with all creation; and
- call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries.

This Direction Statement led the Sisters of Mercy to the Pathways Toward the Future process (1996-1999), which gathered the hopes and dreams of Sisters of Mercy, Associates, and Co-ministers in twelve countries and shaped the content and deliberations of the Third Institute Chapter in St. Louis (June 21-30, 1999). During the June 1999 Institute Chapter, an Action Plan emerged which concentrates on five areas that are being implemented between 1999 and 2005. The action areas are Solidarity with Economically Poor People, Women and the Church, Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism, Earth, and Community and Shared Resources. Mercy Volunteer Corps is guided by this Action Plan and seeks to act in accordance with these priorities of the Sisters of Mercy, their Associates, and Co-ministers.

MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS THEOLOGY OF MISSION

Called and missioned by God, the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff, board members, and volunteers commit to the values of compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth. The mission of Mercy Volunteer Corps is rooted in the Christian tradition and inspired by Catherine McAuley's commitment to following Jesus through compassionate service. In partnership with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Mercy Volunteer Corps is dedicated to connecting lay women and men with people who are economically poor or marginalized. Committed to this mission of mercy, we seek to respond as a community to the tremendous disparities of wealth and power in our world.

We seek to model service that is characterized by accompaniment, mutuality, and respect. We strive to respect the life and dignity of each person with whom we live, serve, and pray, ever conscious of God's presence in all of creation. In our service, community, and prayer, we reach out in love and mercy and learn to receive love and mercy from others. Opening ourselves to God's transforming grace, we hope to be instruments of peace and agents of change in the world.

MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS VISION STATEMENT

Rooted in the spirit of the Scriptures and Catherine McAuley and challenged by the needs of a world in a new millennium, **Mercy Volunteer Corps**, committed to achieving a more merciful and just world, invites women and men to join with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas to:

- expand the boundaries of **service** to poor, sick, and uneducated persons within and beyond the U.S.;
- encourage multicultural **diversity** within the Mercy Volunteer Corps community and among the people served;
- participate in building **community** with poor persons and the other ministers of service at the service sites;
- embrace the growth inherent in the **conversion** process of acting in solidarity with economically poor or marginalized people;
- integrate the learned **values** of **service**, **community**, and **prayer** into their life experience; and
- develop new **relationships** with the Mercy community throughout and beyond their service year(s).

HISTORY OF MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS

Mercy Volunteer Corps is a lay volunteer ministry program for women and men grounded in Christian values as witnessed by the Sisters of Mercy, who have as their model of service, their foundress, Catherine McAuley. Established by the Merion (PA) Regional Community of the Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Volunteer Corps was founded in response to the growing needs of economically poor people throughout the United States and began with two full-time volunteers in 1978.

In the years that followed, the numbers of sites and volunteers expanded. Additionally, support was gained from Sisters of Mercy across the United States.

In 1991 when the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas was formed, gathering 25 individual Mercy Regional Communities into one Institute structure, Mercy Volunteer Corps was formally recognized as a ministerial arm of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. In 1993 Mercy Volunteer Corps was incorporated under the auspices of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, a governing Board of Directors was established, and the staff was expanded to include a full-time Executive Director, Assistant Director, and Administrative Assistant.

Building on its Institute-wide sponsorship, Mercy Volunteer Corps met with representatives from eight western and mid-western regional communities of the Sisters of Mercy in January 1997 and began sending volunteers to the West Coast in August 1997.

Former volunteers and supporters of Mercy Volunteer Corps gathered in Pennsylvania in the spring of 1998 to celebrate the organization's first 20 years of service.

A part-time Development Coordinator was added in 1997 (full-time as of September 2000) followed by a second full-time Assistant Director (presently the International Program Coordinator) in 1998.

The Board of Directors affirmed the findings of the international feasibility study conducted during the 1998-99 volunteer year to expand to international sites. The first international volunteers were commissioned in August 2000 when they began a two year term of service in Georgetown, Guyana, South America.

To accommodate the growing needs of the organization, staff positions were reconfigured in July 2003 to include: Executive Director, U.S. Program Coordinator, International Program Coordinator, Recruitment and Publicity Coordinator, and Office Administrator.

In October 2003 MVC marked 25 years of compassionate service with a Gala Celebration held at the motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy, Merion, PA. The first "Widening Circles award" recognized Verizon Volunteers for their commitment to service in the community. The Merion Regional Community, founders of MVC, and the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, who sponsor MVC, both received the first "The Mercy Legacy Awards" in recognition of their support of MVC over the first 25 years.

PROFILE OF MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS

Volunteers extend the spirit of mercy as modeled by Jesus, Catherine McAuley, and the Sisters of Mercy. To expand and support the compassionate service of the Sisters of Mercy to those who are poor, sick, and uneducated, volunteers work especially with people who are economically poor or marginalized, live simply in community, and commit to personal and communal spiritual growth. Motivation to serve the people of God, flexibility, and a sense of humor are essential characteristics of an appropriate applicant. Applicants must be at least 21 years of age with some college or work experience. Some service experience is preferred before a person makes application. Mercy Volunteer Corps invites applicants from all faith traditions who can live and serve within the spirit of the Catholic tradition.

Volunteers are placed in service sites compatible with their gifts and the needs of the site. The International term of service is two years. The ending date of the commitment varies according to site needs. Volunteers may extend their commitment for a longer period of time after consultation with the Mercy Volunteer Corps Executive Director, International Program Coordinator, and the Receiving Community in the country of service.

Through Mercy Volunteer Corps, more than 700 women and men have served economically poor or marginalized people across the United States and in Guyana since 1978. Today, volunteers range in age from 21 to 75 and reflect a variety of backgrounds, professional preparation, and occupations. They serve generously among people who are economically poor or marginalized as social workers, teachers and teacher aides, parish ministers, health care workers, HIV/AIDS caregivers, and more. Volunteers live in community and share household responsibilities with other Mercy Volunteers, Sisters of Mercy, Associates, Co-ministers, or volunteers from other faith-based programs. In community, volunteers also share their spirituality, reflecting their unique awareness of God in daily life.

FORMATION PROGRAM

The Mercy Volunteer Corps Formation Program for international volunteers is composed of several elements including: Discernment, Cross-Cultural Training, MVC Orientation, Mid-Year and Transition Retreats, and Re-Entry Retreat. Full attendance and participation in these programs is required to fulfill the commitment to Mercy Volunteer Corps.

Formation: Prior to Mission

Commitment to Discernment

Choosing to serve internationally for two years is a tremendous commitment and generous gift. Recognizing the importance of making the best possible match between the individual, the volunteer program, and the sites of service, Mercy Volunteer Corps desires to partner with individuals who value and commit to an intentional process of discernment. This mutual discernment is characterized by a commitment from both the applicant and MVC to ongoing prayerful reflection throughout the application and screening processes on whether the applicant and MVC will be well-matched (e.g., in terms of needs, values, and readiness for international placement). This spirit of mutual discernment continues in the placement process and throughout a volunteer's term of service as questions and needs arise.

Discernment Weekend

In addition to the commitment to mutual discernment, there are formal steps in the discernment process. The process begins with conversation with MVC staff and completion of MVC's application including comprehensive essays and an autobiography. The initial screening of the application includes a phone interview, and, if applicable, an assessment of language proficiency. Appropriate candidates are then required to attend a Discernment Weekend where candidates gather with staff for interviews, psychological assessment, presentations, prayer, and sharing with others who are discerning a call to cross-cultural service. Following the completion of the Discernment Weekend and review of the written psychological assessment, MVC extends or declines acceptance to candidates to continue to cross-cultural training.

Cross-Cultural Training

MVC is committed to quality and thorough cross-cultural preparation for international volunteers, to ensure a rewarding experience for the volunteer, the Receiving Community, the sites of service, and MVC. International Mercy Volunteers attend an intensive preparation program for cross-cultural service, mission, and living.

Mercy Volunteer Corps Orientation

Orientation for all Mercy Volunteers is typically held the first week of August. The weeklong program introduces volunteers to the Mercy Volunteer Corps' commitment to compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth, and to the charism of the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Volunteer Corps. During the week, volunteers have the opportunity to meet those who will serve across the U.S. and internationally, the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff, and members of the extended Mercy Volunteer Corps community. Each day includes structured time for morning prayer, presentations, activities, and small group discussions as well as free time for reflection, prayer, socializing, and outdoor activities. Participation is critical, for international volunteers as they will not have another opportunity to gather with such a large group of the extended MVC community.

Continuing Education and Preparation

During the discernment and cross-cultural programs and the MVC Orientation, candidates are provided with resources and materials on the culture(s) and sites of service to which they may be missioned. The Mercy Volunteer Corps Main office will provide materials. Candidates are expected to engage in this process by seeking out resources and information to enhance their learning about the country/culture as well.

Formation: In Mission

In-Country Orientation

The Receiving Community (including Sisters of Mercy, Associates, site representatives, and second-year volunteers), in collaboration with the Mercy Volunteer Corps International Program Coordinator, will arrange for and provide orientation to the local culture and community following arrival in-country. The in-country orientation will consist of cultural orientation, overviews of the historical/socio-economic/political/environmental realities (as available), introduc-

tion to the local language (as applicable and available), orientation to the local community and to the service site(s).

On-going Formation and Communication with the MVC Office

Mercy Volunteer Corps maintains regular communication with the international volunteers. The MVC International Program Coordinator connects with the volunteers via email, occasional phone calls, and site visits. Mercy Volunteers receive a monthly mailing from the MVC Office which includes the volunteer newsletter, **Corps Connections**, along with other resources. The MVC International Program Coordinator should be contacted by the volunteers, Regional Contact, or Support Person in the event of an emergency or urgent need.

On-Site Support

A local Regional Contact and Support Person/Team is assigned to the Mercy Volunteer Corps international volunteers to help facilitate ongoing cultural adjustment, reflection, and personal and communal spiritual growth.

Mid-Year Retreats

The Regional Contact and Support Person/Team provide at least one, ideally two, Mid-Year Retreats (during each of the two years) for the international volunteers. The frequency, location, and content for each Mid-Year Retreat are determined locally by the Regional Contact, Support Person/Team, and the volunteers. These retreats are held to help build and sustain the volunteer community, to provide volunteers with an opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences of service, community, and spirituality, and to support and challenge volunteers toward continued growth and development.

Transition Retreat

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides an annual Transition Retreat for all international volunteers. The retreat provides time for volunteers to reflect on, process, and share their experiences with one another, the Regional Contact (if available to attend), and MVC staff as they begin to integrate them into steps and choices for their second year of service and/or future. The retreat provides opportunities for on-going pastoral theological reflection, time for rest, renewal, and prayer, and opportunity for additional input on such topics as social analysis, holistic health and wellness, and acculturation. Volunteers moving into their second year of service are challenged to consider how they will live differently as a result of their 1st year of MVC service. Preparation work for departure and re-entry at the end of the

term of service is also completed with second-year volunteers.

Formation: After Mission

Re-Entry Workshop

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides a re-entry workshop for all international volunteers who have completed their two-year term of service. This workshop is typically offered no earlier than 3 months after the date of re-entry. The workshop provides a prayerful retreat setting where volunteers have the opportunity to share and process their experiences in mission and their life transition since their return to their dominant culture.

SITE OF SERVICE SELECTION

Criteria for Sites

Mercy Volunteer Corps partners with a site of service based on several factors:

- the financial and personnel needs of the service site;
- the resonance of its philosophy with the Direction Statement of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, the 1999-2005 Action Plan of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, and the Mercy Volunteer Corps Theology of Mission;
- the formative experience, support, and supervision the site can offer a volunteer;
- its commitment to advocacy and systemic change.

Priority is given to placing volunteers at sites that:

- are located in an area where a cluster of sites and volunteer placement opportunities will allow for a community of ideally four persons*;
- are connected with the Sisters of Mercy (by direct sponsorship or by the presence of a Sister of Mercy or Associate on the staff or board)**;
- provide direct service and/or advocacy to people who are economically poor or marginalized;
- possess minimal financial and personnel resources to meet their need(s);
- demonstrate that the volunteer's role in the site does not deprive a local person from being hired into a salaried position.

**It is the policy of Mercy Volunteer Corps that volunteers live in community, preferably a community of four persons. Communities may vary from a group of Mercy Volunteers living together to Mercy Volunteers living with Sisters of Mercy, Associates, Co-Ministers, or volunteers from another faith-based program.*

***While Mercy Volunteer Corps gives priority to sites connected to the Sisters of Mercy, MVC extends to sites not specifically identified with the Sisters of Mercy when possible. Proximity to a Mercy connection (i.e., Sister of Mercy, Associate, Co-minister, or MVC Alumna/us) within the geographic area of a site is required for site feasibility and the ongoing development of volunteers.*

Site Application Process

In collaboration with the MVC Regional Contact, Mercy Volunteer Corps evaluates its service sites annually. Service sites are selected following a site visit by a member of the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff and review of the new site request application. When applicable, previous association with the site and the evaluations of past and present volunteers are considered.

Sites are required to follow the steps outlined below. Sites are informed of site selection decisions following the site visit of the MVC staff.

1. Contact the Mercy Volunteer Corps office as soon as possible to request a new site application and a visit by MVC staff.
2. Review the Mercy Volunteer Corps International Handbook
3. Submit the completed *New Site Request Application** and include brochures, press clips, medical insurance information, and other materials that will help Mercy Volunteer Corps to know the Receiving Community and local ministries better.
4. Upon acceptance of the new site application, the Mercy Volunteer Corps Main office will arrange a second site visit. Typically, two visits are necessary before January of the year the site requests volunteers (i.e. two visits completed before Jan. 2007 to receive volunteers in August/September 2007).

*If needed or desired, the MVC staff may complete the new site application on the site's behalf, in conjunction with the site visit.

VOLUNTEER SELECTION

Application and Placement Process

The MVC Main office facilitates the application and placement processes. Prospective volunteers make an initial contact with a Mercy Volunteer Corps representative. An initial information packet and preliminary application are sent to the applicant. When the applicant returns the preliminary application to the Main office, a full application packet is sent to her/him.

Applicants must then complete and return their *complete* application packet to the Main office. A *complete application packet includes* the application form, photo, résumé, typed essays and autobiography, medical form, physician's report, college transcripts, professional certification/licensure (if applicable), and four references. All of these materials must be compiled and returned to the Main office along with a complete photocopy of all materials (with the exception of the reference forms which remain in sealed envelopes).

Following receipt of a complete application, the file is screened by Mercy Volunteer Corps staff and screening committee members. The MVC International Program Coordinator arranges a phone interview and language proficiency assessment when applicable. If it is recommended that the individual moves forward to the Discernment Weekend, the candidate is invited to the next available weekend. Candidates who accept the invitation to a Discernment Weekend then receive preparation materials (*see description of the Discernment Weekend under "Formation" for further information*). Following completion of the Discernment Weekend and MVC staff review of the written psychological assessment, MVC extends or declines acceptance to candidates for cross-cultural training and volunteer placement.

An accepted candidate who commits to cross-cultural training and a two-year term of service as a Mercy Volunteer, dialogues with staff regarding possible placements and finding the best match between the candidate's gifts, experience, and desires with the site's realities and needs. Following successful completion of the cross-cultural training program a final commitment to placement is made.

Statement of Non-Discrimination

Mercy Volunteer Corps does not discriminate in program ad-

mission based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic unrelated to one's ability to perform the essential functions and basic tenets of Mercy Volunteer Corps or any bona fide occupational function of a specific volunteer placement.

VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

Mercy Volunteers serving internationally make a two-year commitment to all of the components of the Mercy Volunteer Corps program. This commitment is expressed through the interconnected values of *compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth*. Through their personal commitment to the Mercy Volunteer Corps program, volunteers are committing to the program, their community members, and their co-workers and clients at their site of service. Volunteers have the option to renew their commitment for a third year in consultation with the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff and Receiving Community.

Compassionate Service

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides volunteers with an opportunity to join the Sisters of Mercy, their Associates and Co-ministers, in service with people who are poor, sick, and uneducated in our world. Through a full-time service placement, volunteers work at a variety of social service agencies, schools, and health care facilities that are committed to achieving a more merciful and just world. Mercy Volunteer Corps and the sites of service call the volunteers to service characterized by mutuality, respect, and compassion. Rather than "giving to and doing for," service with Mercy Volunteer Corps is about the mutual empowerment of volunteers and clients, both giving and receiving, and advocating *with* instead of *for* the people they encounter daily in their service.

Through their service placement and often in the neighborhood or area in which they are living, volunteers witness firsthand the daily struggles of poor or marginalized persons in our world. Their own experiences and those of their community members challenge volunteers to consider the multiple systems contributing to the oppression and poverty they face each day. Together, we seek to respond with faith and creative actions to help bring justice and in turn peace to our corner of the world.

Volunteers commit to:

- working in a spirit of solidarity and empowerment with people who are poor or marginalized in today's world;
- striving to be merciful and just in their own attitudes, language, and actions to keep their presence credible and desired.

Simple Lifestyle in Community

Volunteers live in community with others and commit to supporting a community characterized by mutual respect and encouragement of one another. Mercy Volunteer Corps challenges all volunteers to find a common framework for sharing faith and making choices promoting a more merciful and just world with their community. Volunteers are challenged to form honest and open relationships. This challenge calls volunteers to confront tensions respectfully and address and celebrate differences among them. Learnings around communication and interdependence are often carried into a volunteer's relationships, jobs, and life experiences beyond their MVC term of service.

The commitment to Mercy Volunteer Corps requires volunteers to live on small personal stipend and to contribute their food stipend to a community fund for food and household expenses. While the necessities are provided, volunteers must make conscious choices about their spending and use of resources. Careful consideration should also be given to bringing or leaving behind many material possessions or conveniences during the term of service. Mercy Volunteers are challenged to limit their use of conveniences (e.g., appliances, personal vehicles, utilities, TVs, computers, email, long distance calls*). Volunteers commit to living on their stipend and not supplementing it with personal savings or money from friends, family members, or other sources. The simple, community lifestyle of Mercy Volunteer Corps allows volunteers to focus on people rather than possessions and to be more aware of the daily realities of the economically poor or marginalized persons with whom they work and encounter each day.

The commitment to a simple lifestyle calls volunteers individually and with their community members to examine personal and community purchases and choices around food, water usage, recycling, household items, social activities, appliance usage, utility usage, and so on. As part of their community lifestyle, volunteers must

come to a consensus with their community members around the use of the common money for food and household items.

Volunteers commit to:

- seeking to live a life focused on persons and relationships rather than objects and acquisitions;
- challenging one another and remaining open to challenges from others in discerning the concrete aspects of their communal lifestyle;
- examining their role and the implications of their choices and actions within their broader neighborhood community, the environment, the local culture, and the global community;
- living on their monthly food and personal stipends;
- bringing openness and honesty to their community and a willingness to share their lives, experiences, and spirituality with community members;
- taking part in community activities, including weekly community gatherings, weekly spiritual sharing, community business meetings, informal meal and social times;
- cooperating with the Guest Policies outlined by the Receiving Communities providing housing and by the Mercy Volunteer Corps policy regarding guests;
- participating in community and individual meetings with their Support Person(s) and Regional Contact;
- accepting the support of their community, Support Person(s), Regional Contact, and the MVC staff.

*See Country-Specific Addendums for further guidance.

Spiritual Growth

Along with compassionate service and a simple lifestyle in community, volunteers commit to personal and communal spiritual growth during their term of service. Serving with Mercy Volunteer Corps provides volunteers the opportunity to examine and integrate their faith with their experiences with and among economically poor or marginalized persons and in the context of a simple community lifestyle. Volunteers commit to personal reflection on the presence and movement of God in their daily life and experiences and to sharing these reflections and their own spirituality with their community.

Mercy Volunteer Corps draws its charism and spirituality from the Sisters of Mercy and their foundress Catherine McAuley. The Sisters of Mercy live an apostolic commitment of service to the Church and the world. They are called, in particular, to serve those who are poor, sick, and uneducated in society, especially women and children. As a lay ministry of the Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Volunteer Corps calls volunteers to serve with them within this charism.

MVC welcomes people of all faiths. Therefore, part of sharing spirituality is being open to and respectful of differences in faith. It also involves finding ways to realistically pray together with those differences.

Volunteers commit to:

- striving toward spiritual growth, consistently spending time in personal reflection and prayer;
- participating fully in and occasionally planning weekly community times of spiritual sharing, reflection, and prayer;
- sharing their own gifts and cherishing the gifts of others;
- participating actively in Mercy Volunteer Corps retreats by being on time and present to the planned activities and to the community of volunteers and staff.

**FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES FOR SITES,
VOLUNTEERS, AND REGIONAL CONTACTS**

**International Financial Provisions of MVC,
Volunteers, and Sites of Service**

Provisions of Mercy Volunteer Corps

Prior to Mission: Mercy Volunteer Corps takes responsibility for assessment and orientation costs for the volunteer prior to mission including the psychological assessment, Discernment Weekend program costs, travel and program costs for the cross-cultural training program, and program costs for MVC Orientation. Should a candidate withdraw from the international placement process at any point following the Discernment Weekend, s/he is asked to contribute to MVC's pre-placement costs as possible.

In Mission: Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or the sponsoring site provide basic living expenses (housing, utilities, food, and transportation) and a personal stipend of spending equivalent to approxi-

mately \$60US per month (varies with each country). Mercy Volunteer Corps provides medical insurance, with provisions for the specific needs of international service, and transportation to and from the site of service at the beginning and end of the two-year term of service. Costs for medications (i.e. malaria prophylaxis) required during the term of service are assumed by Mercy Volunteer Corps. Additionally, Mercy Volunteer Corps provides for expenses related to supporting the formation of the volunteers including staff travel, necessary communication between the MVC office and the volunteers, sites of service, or Sisters of Mercy in-country, and Mid-Year and Transition Retreats.

After Mission: Mercy Volunteer Corps assumes responsibility for the travel and program costs of a re-entry workshop or retreat (to be determined by MVC) for a volunteer returning after completion of her/his two-year commitment to Mercy Volunteer Corps. Additionally, Mercy Volunteer Corps provides a volunteer who completes the full two-year commitment with a **readjustment allowance of \$1,000** upon return to the U.S.

Contributions of the Mercy Volunteer

Prior to Mission: International volunteers assume financial responsibility for travel to and from the Discernment Weekend, for obtaining a passport, visa (as necessary), and any medical exams and/or vaccinations required for the region to which she or he is missioned, and travel to and from the Mercy Volunteer Corps Orientation. Mercy Volunteer Corps international volunteers commit to **fundraising \$3,000** toward the Mercy Volunteer Corps International Program's costs, which support the volunteer's expenses in mission. The total funds raised must be received in the Mercy Volunteer Corps office prior to departure for service.

Contributions of the Site

Mercy Volunteer Corps recognizes the severe financial limitations of many international sites of service. MVC desires to partner with sites engaged in the works of mercy who cannot assume the expenses of supporting a Mercy Volunteer. Therefore the contribution of the site will be determined on a case by case basis. MVC does ask that the sites make some contribution toward financial support of the volunteer if possible (e.g., a monthly financial commitment or an in-kind contribution such as a daily meal at their site).

Housing

Volunteers live together in community with other volunteers, Sisters of Mercy, Associates or Co-ministers, or volunteers from other faith-based programs. The Regional Contact, in consultation with the sponsoring sites and the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff, is responsible for securing housing and furnishings.

Housing should be simple and located near or among the people with whom the volunteers work. Housing must be accessible to their service placements, public transit system, market/grocery store, city resources, and, ideally, churches. The hope is that there is adequate bedroom and community living space to house volunteers simply yet comfortably and safely in a given community.

When the volunteers arrive, housing must be secure and ready for occupancy, with furnishings, kitchen equipment, and linens, and serviced with utilities and phone (if possible, or available nearby). Each year the Regional Contact and any departing volunteers ensures that the living space is adequately cleaned and furnished for the new group of volunteers.

Utilities

Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or sponsoring sites pay for the monthly costs of water, electricity, gas, and basic telephone service (where available). Volunteers pay their own individual long distance phone charges.

Food and Household Community Fund

Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or the sponsoring sites provide each volunteer a stipend for food and household expenses. The volunteers combine their food stipends into a common fund for food and household expenses. If money remains in the community fund at the end of the month, it is used for the community (e.g., birthdays, outings) or applied to unexpected household expenses.

Through the commitment to a simple lifestyle in community and in solidarity with people who are poor, volunteers should end their term of service with no more or less money than they began. At the end of the term of service, any excess community funds are to be retained by the local MVC community for future or unexpected house-

hold expenses.

Payment of Personal Stipend, Rent, and Utilities

Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or the sponsoring site pay each volunteer a personal stipend with the spending equivalent of approximately **\$60 US monthly** (varies with each country). Payment of housing rent and utilities is negotiated between the Regional Contact, the property owner, and the volunteers.

Emergency Fund

The Mercy Volunteer Corps program retains a substantial emergency fund for unexpected/emergency expenses that may arise. Examples of emergency expenses to be incurred by Mercy Volunteer Corps include: emergency health care treatment that is not covered through the international insurance policy, non-medical emergency evacuation, or emergency trip home due to a life-threatening illness or death of immediate family member (i.e., parent, sibling, or child of the volunteer). If there is a question about the nature of "emergency," the volunteer should contact the MVC Main office for consultation.

Transportation

Expenses related to transportation to and from work and for all travel related to basic needs (e.g., grocery shopping, doctor visits) are provided by Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or the sponsoring site. Reliable public transportation is acceptable for transporting a volunteer to and from work. Funds provided to a volunteer for the transportation needs described above should not supplement the volunteer's stipend. Amounts vary across sites depending upon the volunteer's means of transportation to and from work. If a volunteer incurs no such expense, they are not provided with transportation funds.

Orientation, Placement, and Retreat Travel Costs

Volunteers provide their own transportation to the Discernment Weekend and MVC Orientation in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Travel to the placement site and home at the completion of the two-year commitment is the responsibility of Mercy Volunteer

Corps. MVC provides necessary funds for the travel and retreat expenses of the volunteers' Mid-Year and Transition Retreats.

Personal Property

It is important to note that **all items of personal property are the responsibility of the volunteer**. In accordance with the commitment to a simple lifestyle in community, Mercy Volunteers are expected to live within the limitations created by the stipend provided. Mercy Volunteers are asked to carefully consider the personal property they bring with them during their term of service, particularly valuable and/or convenience items (e.g., computers, stereos, expensive camera/video equipment, valuable jewelry). MVC encourages volunteers to bring only essential items during their term of service and discourages them from bringing items that are irreplaceable or of significant value (whether monetary or sentimental). Mercy Volunteer Corps, the Sisters of Mercy, the sites of service, and the owners of the volunteer housing assume **no** responsibility for the replacement of a volunteer's personal property should it be damaged, stolen, or destroyed.

Vacation and Other Time Off

Mercy Volunteer Corps asks sites to grant volunteers two weeks (10 workdays) vacation during the year in addition to holidays, sick days, etc. given full-time staff at the sites of service.

MVC-Related Time Off

In addition to the time off described above, sites are expected to allow additional time off for the volunteers to attend MVC retreats. Sometimes volunteers need to take the day before the Mid-Year Retreat begins for travel in order to attend in full. Volunteers will have at least one Mid-Year Retreat, but not more than two, to attend annually. All Mercy Volunteers attend the Transition Retreat annually (led by the MVC staff), which is typically 4 days and requires volunteers to travel on the day before and day after the retreat.

Medical Insurance and Related Expenses

Mercy Volunteer Corps assumes responsibility for the volunteer's medical insurance coverage from their day of departure to

their international site through the completion of the service period. The Mercy Volunteer Corps office seeks coverage that is designed specifically for U.S. citizens and/or missionaries living abroad. It provides extensive emergency medical coverage. It is not intended for routine primary care, and MVC does not provide for routine primary care during the term of service. Volunteers are required to complete all primary care needs at their expense prior to departure including: any eye or dental care expenses, a thorough physical examination, any pending medical needs, all required vaccinations/immunizations.

It is critical that volunteers familiarize themselves with the provisions, policies, and procedures of their insurance policy. The specific policies and procedures - particularly in the event of an emergency/ emergency evacuation - must be followed to ensure coverage from the insurance company. Mercy Volunteer Corps assumes responsibility for the deductible required by the medical insurance policy. If a volunteer requires regular and/or extensive medical care that unexpectedly causes heavy financial or emotional strain on the volunteer, the service site, or the Receiving Community, the Mercy Volunteer Corps International Program Coordinator and Executive Director should be further consulted.

In the case of a pre-existing medical condition that is not covered by the medical plan and requires prescriptive medicine, the volunteer is responsible for the costs of the prescription(s). If such costs prove prohibitive in a volunteer's ability to serve with Mercy Volunteer Corps, negotiations may take place between the volunteer and Mercy Volunteer Corps prior to placement. It is the responsibility of applicants to disclose such information prior to placement so that an agreement may be reached before the term of service begins. Any expenses for undisclosed pre-existing conditions will be the responsibility of the volunteer.

If a volunteer chooses to remain on her/his previous insurance plan, s/he must discuss the financial and medical coverage implications of this decision with the MVC International Program Coordinator prior to a final commitment to placement.

Taxes

Each volunteer is responsible for any personal U.S. tax liability (e.g., taxes owed on wages earned prior to and/or following the completion of the term of service, Social Security or pension payments, or investment income). Each volunteer assumes full responsibility for filing any required U.S. tax documents before, during, and following her/his term of service.

Student Loans

Mercy Volunteers may qualify for a deferment of the repayment of their student loans during their term of service. Each volunteer is responsible for determining the eligibility of her/his student loans for deferment, for obtaining and completing the relevant forms and signatures, and for submitting the forms to Mercy Volunteer Corps Main office or other appropriate office for processing.

Living Will and Last Will and Testament

Mercy Volunteer Corps suggests that volunteers consider a Living Will. If the volunteer decides to do so, it is recommended that s/he consult with her/his doctor. Mercy Volunteer Corps also encourages volunteers to consider establishing a Last Will and Testament and a Power of Attorney prior to departure.

GUIDELINES AND POLICIES FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITY LIVING

Mercy Volunteer Corps seeks to promote a healthy community environment for volunteers. The following guidelines will assist communities and individuals in building a community conscious of holistic and healthful practices and committed to choices and practices benefiting the good of the community over individual desires or preferences. Mercy Volunteer Corps holds volunteers responsible for the following:

Responsible Tenant Practices

Volunteers are considered tenants in their housing and are accountable for the upkeep of the residence, prompt bill payment, informing the owner and/or other responsible party about problems or needed repairs, and any other tenant responsibilities. Volunteers are expected to maintain good communication with the owner or other responsible party regarding housing issues. Volunteers are expected to assist their community members, Regional Contact, and owner with cleaning and closing the residence at the end of the term of service.

Pets

Pets or animals of any kind are not permitted in a Mercy Volunteer Corps community.

Commitment to Simplicity in Use of Free Time

Since volunteers' commitment to their service sites is full-time and they also commit to a simple lifestyle in community and spiritual growth, they are prohibited from taking part-time paid work or enrolling in college level courses for credit. Volunteers may participate in recreational activities, community sponsored programs, non-credit classes, church ministries, or other outside activities that will provide personal and/or spiritual enhancement as long as the time, relationships, and expenses involved in such activities do not interfere with the volunteer's priority toward a simple lifestyle in community.

Balance in Lifestyle and Relationships

The commitment to a term of service as a Mercy Volunteer demands a great deal of an individual's time, energy, and focus. In the midst of the commitment to compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth, volunteers are invited and challenged to be attentive to their choices and balance in their daily life, activities, and commitments. **Outside activities, personal obligations, and significant relationships can demand more of someone's time, energy, and spirit than can healthfully be balanced along with the primary MVC commitment.** The Mercy Volunteer is called to be forthcoming and open to conversation about these challenges with the MVC staff, Regional Contact, Support Person, and their MVC community. The MVC staff is committed to walking with volunteers throughout their term of service and to challenging them to a balanced and healthy lifestyle. Additionally, each Mercy Volunteer in an MVC community is responsible for supporting and challenging each other in living out this commitment.

Dating and Personal Relationships

A Mercy Volunteer is sent on mission by Mercy Volunteer Corps to an entire community of people (the Receiving Community as a

whole). This is the fundamental relationship for the volunteer and all other personal relationships must be considered in terms of their affect on it. Strong friendships with the Receiving Community often develop naturally in mission. When healthfully balanced with the primary MVC commitment, these friendships can be a significant source of strength and learning for the volunteer and enhance a Mercy volunteer's ability to live out Mercy Volunteer Corps' mission. Additionally, a Mercy volunteer's inability or unwillingness to be open to mutuality in relationships with one person or group of persons can also adversely affect Mercy Volunteer Corps' mission and the Receiving Community.

It is possible that cultural disorientation and loneliness will, on occasion, make the volunteer susceptible to excessive involvement or dependence on one person or group of persons. This is an understandable development, but one that can interfere with the volunteer's ability to choose a balanced and healthy lifestyle, and may be considered a serious conflict of interest to Mercy Volunteer Corps' International Program. Dating is strongly discouraged.

Guest Policy

Family and friends are most welcome at Mercy Volunteer Corps community residences. Because the integrity and comfort of the community as a whole is always a priority, all community members and the Regional Contact must be notified in advance of a visitor's arrival and length of stay. The length of stay for guests is not to exceed one week.

If the presence of an individual or group takes a volunteer away from community life and activities or diminishes the spirit of the community, the community members and/or Mercy Volunteer Corps representative have the responsibility to challenge the volunteer in light of her/his commitment. Any visitor or group of visitors that infringes upon the integrity of an individual member or of the community as a whole, may be asked to leave by community consensus or at the request of the Regional Contact, Support Person, or a Mercy Volunteer Corps staff member.

In order to protect the privacy and comfort of all community members, the cohesion of the community, the reputation and integrity of the Mercy Volunteer Corps organization, the Sisters of Mercy and service sites in the communities where volunteers live and serve, guests are required to use guest rooms or to make arrangements outside of the MVC community residence. **The Regional Contact should be consulted for recommendations on culturally ap-**

appropriate accommodations.

Volunteers and/or guests are prohibited from engaging in any sexual activity in the Mercy Volunteer Corps residence and at anytime or in any place connected with a volunteer's Mercy Volunteer Corps commitment.

Commitment to Not Travel Home

Anyone discerning international service as a Mercy Volunteer must consider MVC's commitment to not travel home in their decision. There are several reasons for the MVC policy and commitment to not travel home. First, the MVC commitments to compassionate service and a simple lifestyle in community call volunteers to live in a spirit of solidarity with the local community. Travel abroad is an unimaginable luxury for most people with whom Mercy Volunteers are living and serving internationally. The choices and opportunities in life for most of the people with whom volunteers serve will never compare to those of most Mercy Volunteers. In a spirit of simplicity and solidarity with the local community, Mercy Volunteers are asked to commit to not travel home during their term of service.

Second, the process of acculturation and immersion to a new culture is challenging for any individual serving internationally. Regular contact with and/or a visit to one's home culture can disrupt this critical process in the MVC experience. Third, such a choice to utilize funds beyond one's stipend could disrupt the cohesion of the local MVC community particularly when only volunteers with substantial personal or family funds could consider this choice while other volunteers may not have such resources.

MVC is clear about the reasons for and benefits of this policy and commitment. However, the staff also recognizes that situations can arise which lead a volunteer to consider a trip home. In such a case, MVC desires and commits to dialoguing openly with the volunteer about the situation and the volunteer's options. MVC also expects the volunteer to thoughtfully and prayerfully discern their options, including the Receiving Community and Mercy Volunteer community in their discernment and conversations, and remembering the reasons for the policy named above.

Emergency Procedures

While the MVC staff respects the independence and privacy of each volunteer and volunteer community, MVC is also committed to promoting the safety and well being of all volunteers and volunteer

communities. There will be times when it is necessary for MVC staff to be informed of and/or involved in situations that effect individual and communal well being. It is of particular importance that the MVC staff be apprised of emergency situations. Regional Contacts, Support Persons, and volunteers all have responsibilities for informing one another and MVC staff of serious or emergency situations. Volunteers are also asked to share their personal emergency contact information and medical policy information with their Regional Contact and community members so that the information will be easily accessible if needed. Voice mail messages can be left 24 hours a day at the MVC office, 215-641-5535. The following guidelines are intended to help all parties to know if and when to contact the MVC office (this list is not exhaustive):

- Should one or more volunteers experience any life threatening emergency including a natural or unnatural disaster, accident, or other event, MVC expects to be contacted as soon as possible regardless of the day or time.
- Should one or more volunteers be in the area of an emergency or disaster (e.g., natural or unnatural disaster, accident, or other serious event) and everyone is safe, please contact MVC to let us know that everyone is alright.
- If a volunteer is injured or ill and requires emergency care and/or hospitalization and the situation is stable, please contact MVC at the earliest convenience.
- If a volunteer is released or notified of pending release from the service placement or anticipates leaving the placement, MVC should be contacted during the closest business day.
- Other situations may arise in which the community feels a need to inform MVC (e.g., disputes, financial problems, or other situations or incidents). Volunteers should feel free to call the office; MVC staff members are available to listen and assist as needed.

N.B., Whenever it is appropriate to contact the MVC office, the Regional Contact and/or Support Person should also be contacted.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Mercy Volunteer Corps has great concern for the adverse affects of alcohol and drug abuse on many people's lives and is committed to modeling the responsible use of alcohol and non-use of drugs during MVC formation programs (Orientation, Mid-Year Retreat

(s), Transition Retreat), within our local communities, and as individual staff members and volunteers. Alcohol and drug abuse among the membership of Mercy Volunteer Corps interferes with and is inconsistent with MVC's mission. The MVC staff is committed to addressing alcohol or drug related problems arising during the volunteer year among individuals, local communities, or the extended Mercy Volunteer Corps community.

The MVC staff is neither qualified nor inclined to provide therapeutic treatment. However, the staff assumes responsibility for addressing an individual or community for whom alcohol or drug abuse may be a problem. When necessary, appropriate referrals will be made and support extended during the ensuing treatment.

Mercy Volunteer Corps expects volunteers and staff to cooperate in promoting non-use of drugs and responsible use of alcohol as consistent with the commitment to MVC's core components.

MVC Drug and Alcohol Abuse Policy:

A. Drug and Alcohol Use: During the contracted term of service with Mercy Volunteer Corps, regardless of location, unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of a controlled substance, and excessive use of alcohol, that may adversely affect a volunteer's job performance or ability to fulfill her/his Mercy Volunteer Corps commitment, or that may reflect unfavorably upon public confidence in the manner in which Mercy Volunteer Corps carries out its activities, is prohibited.

B. Disciplinary Action: Failure to adhere to this policy may result in disciplinary action, including termination.

MVC Harassment Policy

Mercy Volunteer Corps will not tolerate harassment of any kind. Any member who believes that she or he has been subject to harassment of any kind, or who has knowledge about harassment of others, should report the harassment to an immediate supervisor, superior, and/or the MVC Executive Director. Any member who is found to have engaged in harassment will be subject to appropriate discipline, up to and including termination from Mercy Volunteer Corps.

TERMINATION

Should a volunteer's commitment end early, whether on the initiative of the individual, the agency, or the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff, at least two weeks notice must be given to all parties involved, including the Regional Contact and the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff.

A volunteer considering leaving Mercy Volunteer Corps should first talk to her/his Regional Contact and/or Support Person, Site Director, MVC International Program Coordinator, and volunteer community to discuss ways of improving the existing conditions. The volunteer must consider the implications of termination for the site and community, particularly the impact on staffing at the site. It is expected that the Regional Contact and/or Site Director include the MVC International Program Coordinator in the conversations about the situation and reach a resolution together if applicable.

A volunteer who chooses to terminate her/his commitment is responsible for her/his own relocation expenses. A volunteer who leaves Mercy Volunteer Corps early for any reason is thereafter ineligible for the readjustment allowance and the financial provisions related to the Re-Entry Retreat.

Mercy Volunteer Corps retains the right to ask a volunteer to leave the program if s/he fails to uphold the program's policies and the commitment to compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth. At least two weeks notice will be given to all parties. If a volunteer is terminated by her/his site, or by MVC, MVC pays the volunteer's relocation expenses.

In the event that the efforts to resolve disputes leading to termination are unsuccessful, volunteers and other interested individuals may seek resolution through a formal grievance procedure. This procedure may be initiated by contacting the MVC Executive Director who will provide the details of the process.

MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS PROGRAM COMMITMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO SITES AND VOLUNTEERS

During the Placement Process

- Mercy Volunteer Corps recruits, screens, and places volunteers, matching the volunteer's gifts and talents with the service site's

needs to the greatest extent possible.

- Mercy Volunteer Corps sends to sites the applications of candidates who are accepted.
- Mercy Volunteer Corps, in collaboration with the Regional Contact, arranges for a Support Person/Team for the Mercy Volunteer Corps community. They are resources and friends to the community who are available to mentor, facilitate, and support individual and community development.
- Mercy Volunteer Corps notifies sites as soon as possible if no volunteer will be placed there in the coming service year.

During each Service Year

- Mercy Volunteer Corps sponsors the MVC Orientation week for the volunteers. Regional Contacts are invited to attend a portion of the Orientation program as possible.
- The Mercy Volunteer Corps International Program Coordinator visits the site and maintains contact with the Regional Contact, Site Director, and volunteer as needed throughout the term of service. The purpose of the site visit is for the site to promote their work, for MVC to learn more about the site's current work and staffing, and to support the volunteer in her/his service placement. During the site visit the MVC International Program Coordinator:
 - > Meets with the Regional Contact, the Site Director, and whenever possible, visits the volunteer at the service site.
 - > Meets with the volunteer individually to learn more about and to support the volunteer's full Mercy Volunteer Corps experience of service, community, and spiritual growth.
 - > Meets with the community as a whole to explore the mutual experience of community and spiritual growth and to challenge them to further growth.
- The Mercy Volunteer Corps International Program Coordinator coordinates a Transition Retreat during each year of service to

assist the volunteers in integrating their experiences of compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth. (See the *Formation Program* for further explanation.)

- Mercy Volunteer Corps evaluates and reviews the placements each year in light of the criteria and goals of the MVC program. This opportunity is also extended to the volunteer and the site.

REGIONAL CONTACT ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The community of the Sisters of Mercy receiving International Mercy Volunteers choose a Mercy Volunteer Corps (MVC) Regional Contact for the international site. Regional Contacts complement the work of the MVC International Program Coordinator and serve as a liaison between the MVC Main office in the States and the Receiving Community. Regional Contact responsibilities include:

- Identifying potential ministries for volunteer placements in consultation with the MVC International Program Coordinator;
- Collaborating with the Receiving Community and Site Directors in locating and coordinating housing and necessary transportation for volunteers;
- Selecting the Support Person(s) and Extended Support Team for the local Mercy Volunteer Corps community;
- Participating in the annual MVC Orientation (as possible);
- Collaborating with the MVC Support Person/Team in providing in-country Orientation for volunteers and introducing them to the culture of the local community.
- Supporting the ongoing formation of volunteers: visiting volunteers; collaborating with the Support Person(s) to plan and facilitate the Mid-Year Retreat(s) for volunteers; visiting ministries when appropriate; meeting with the Support Person and MVC International Program Coordinator during site visits.
- Notifying the MVC International Program Coordinator of serious or emergency situations related to ministries or volunteers;
- Apprising their Receiving Community of Sisters of Mercy of ongoing

ing developments in Mercy Volunteer Corps.

SUPPORT PERSON ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Support Person is selected by the MVC Regional Contact and MVC International Program Coordinator. The Support Person facilitates opportunities for the spiritual growth of volunteers and the development of the volunteer community. Responsibilities include:

- Collaborating with the MVC Regional Contact in providing In-Country Orientation for volunteers and introducing them to the culture of the local community;
- Facilitating the planning process and periodic evaluation of the volunteers' expectations of and hopes for community living;
- Meeting with the Mercy Volunteer Corps community on a consistent basis, preferably every 4-6 weeks;
- Meeting individually with each volunteer on a consistent basis, preferably every 4-6 weeks.
- Notifying the Regional Contact of all serious or emergency situations in the local Mercy Volunteer Corps community;
- Meeting with the MVC International Program Coordinator and Regional Contact during site visits;
- Facilitating processes for the volunteers ~ including reflection on experiences of service, community, and spirituality, re-visiting of community goals, etc. (especially during times of transition such as when 1st-year volunteers join 2nd-year volunteers or 2nd-year volunteers are preparing for re-entry);
- Assisting with closing the residence used by volunteers.

EST (EXTENDED SUPPORT TEAM) MEMBER ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The MVC Regional Contact and Support Person invite and select people for an Extended Support Team (EST). An EST Member serves as a resource for personal and communal support of the volunteers and their volunteer community. Each EST Member will be invited to share the unique gifts, talents, and resources they bring with the volunteers to provide further support and enrichment to their overall experience as a Mercy Volunteer serving internationally. Responsibilities include:

- Assisting the Regional Contact and Support Person with In-Country Orientation for new Mercy Volunteers and introducing them to the local culture and community;
- Supporting volunteers by listening to their experiences, helping them to process and reflect on their experiences, and offering feedback and resources that may be helpful;
- Inviting volunteers to participate in social activities;
- Inviting volunteers to participate in spiritual, educational, and cultural events;
- Mentoring a volunteer with a similar ministry experience;
- Offering or providing referrals for counseling and/or spiritual direction where desired and needed;
- Being available to volunteers as needed for individual conversation and support;
- Notifying the Support Person and Regional Contact of any emergency situation within the Mercy Volunteer Corps community or with an individual volunteer;
- Meeting with the Mercy Volunteer Corps International Coordinator during site visits as possible;
- Assisting the Support Person and participating in closing activities for the volunteers including closing reflection and celebration.

DIRECTOR OF SITE OF SERVICE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Site of Service is the sponsoring ministry or agency where the volunteer serves. The Director of the Site of Service (or Site Director) is responsible for:

- Submitting a request and job description for Mercy Volunteers desired to the MVC Regional Contact and to update needs periodically;
- Provide orientation for the volunteer to the local area, the Site of Service, and her/his work assignment
- Ensuring that work-related expectations (such as job description, schedule, accountability structures, etc.) are reviewed with the volunteer at the beginning of their service and as needed throughout the year;
- Maintaining contact with the MVC Regional Contact regarding the progress of the volunteer;
- Meeting with the MVC International Program Coordinator during site visits about the progress and performance of the volunteer (when possible).

Notes

