



Student Christian learning and service tours Information for schools

Thank you so much for your expression of interest for your College to participate in an ALWS Student Christian learning and service tour.

At this point, it's probably worth mentioning two things to keep in mind when we discuss the ALWS Student Christian learning and service tour:

- ALWS is an aid and development organisation that is known for long-term, sustainable development in many countries. It is not set up necessarily to 'build houses', but rather to 'build lives and communities' for the long term. All work is led by the people for their own communities.
- ALWS is committed to treating all people in our country programs with dignity and respect. Therefore, service trips can never be just an 'experience' for Australian students or 'poverty tourism'. Instead, service trips need to be a learning experience for all involved – to empower and uplift all people to continue in sustainable and long-term development strategies.

I'm sure from your involvement in ALWS before you know the way we work, but we've found it best to mention these things from the beginning so that we're all on the same page.

Student Christian learning and service tours

ALWS have been running Student Christian learning and service tours for Lutheran Schools since 2004.

In 2014 we are offering schools the opportunity to send students to Cambodia and possibly Nepal or Indonesia as part of join Student Christian learning and service tours.

These Tours link in with the theme and focus country for this year's Awareness Week materials and theme for Awareness Days ... *Health for Life!* and next year's theme *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child!*

This theme will allow schools to learn about all aspects of life required for people to be and feel healthy in their village life:

- Access to affordable medical care,
- Access to clean water,
- Access to a variety of affordable healthy foods,
- Access to sanitation (toilets and drains) and knowledge of hygiene,
- Care for people with disabilities or other special needs,
- Access to education (for children and adults),
- Access to employment and/or land to grow crops,
- LOVE, support, care, help, faith,
- Peace - life without war or violence,
- A safe and secure home,
- Resources to prepare for natural disasters

The focus on Nepal, Indonesia and Cambodia will enable schools to find many links to the Asian strand of the National curriculum and enable students to learn about a country living with destructive poverty.

The ALWS Student Christian learning and service tour aims to target students who are passionate about working overseas (in aid, development or mission) and/or who really feel they can make a difference in their school community to help teach others about poverty and justice issues.

Details of the Tour

- The tours are open to students who complete Year 11 in 2014.
- Schools can send up to three students (they must apply in written form and be interviewed by school staff – showing that they are either interested in aid, development or mission work and/or are passionate about teaching others in their school community about the work of ALWS). Staff will be given guidelines as to suitability of applicants. (Some schools may be offered more student places.)
- Schools may send a teacher from their school on the tour and/or have a teacher who is passionate and supportive to get the school behind the students who are travelling – helping to run Chapel services, raising funds for Nepal, Indonesia or Cambodia, speaking about justice issues, helping with the training of students etc.
- An ALWS staff member (also a registered teacher) will be the tour leader OR a teacher in a Lutheran school who has travelled with ALWS will lead the tour.
- Each school involved must commit to supporting the joint tour – Lutheran Schools working together around Australia! This involves participating in Awareness Day, Awareness Week, supporting the students in fundraising and helping with the teaching and learning that needs to take place in preparation for the tour.
- There will be a total of 20 in the group (numbers depend of how many the country program can take).
- Students and staff will meet all costs themselves (or the school can support the teacher as part of their PD if they choose – this is entirely up to the school and the staff member involved).
- The cost of the tour will be approximately \$3500. The cost **includes** all international flights and domestic flights in the host country, all accommodation, food, sightseeing, transport, departure tax, and expert assistance from ALWS or LWF staff AND a contribution to the work of the program. Costs **do not include** transport costs to your nearest state capital city in Australia, food in Australian airports, passport application or renewal, immunizations, visa or spending money.
- Dates: The tours are for early to mid December – leaving Australia around the 4th of December and returning around the 18th December.
- All participants in the tour must be willing to live and travel simply in a cross-cultural situation and contribute positively to the group.
- All participants in the tour will need to be involved in preparation, learning and fundraising activities before the tour. Most training will happen through e-mail / internet or in the student's own school. There may be opportunity for the group or some of the group to meet beforehand.

- ALWS staff will take care of the logistics of the Christian Service and Learning Tour – flights, organising passports and visas, newsletters to let students and parents know what is happening, liaise with the country to organise itineraries and so on and lead the training and preparation of students and staff. Preparation will happen through newsletters, reading set articles, discussion and some internet interaction. A key teacher at each school will need to commit to help the students at the school in their learning where necessary.

Benefits to Students, Staff and Schools

- Students and staff from Lutheran Schools around Australia have the opportunity to meet and share in an amazing learning opportunity, gaining friends from around the country and overseas.
- Students from smaller schools and schools who have not previously supported ALWS can have the opportunity to serve overseas.
- Staff in developing countries are not overburdened by too many groups wanting to travel to the country, and can concentrate on development work, while at the same time, the people in villages are encouraged by a visit from Australian students and staff each year.
- Potentially there will be a greater number of schools raising funds for the developing country – helping those most in need.
- Ideally, when a student is selected for the tour, the whole school community becomes involved – students, teachers, and ancillary staff. The focus of the whole school participation is for everyone in the school community to develop a compassion for people overseas who are in great need – not as an add on to school life, but as an integral expression of what it means to be a faith-based community.
- This opportunity is also an excellent way to present a fresh image of the Lutheran Church by demonstrating faith-driven hands-on dynamic service ministry.
- To maximise the educational benefits to students, learning about the country of travel, its people and the work of ALWS in that country, should happen regularly, both in Chapel (e.g. monthly) and in the classroom. Resources can be provided by ALWS staff in order for this to happen effectively.
- The focus of the work of ALWS is serving others following the example of Jesus, who came to serve and not be served (Mark 10:45). Through participating in ALWS-focussed programs, the school community should come to see Jesus in everyone in need (Matthew 25). Students can better come to understand true service in action, love in action and the need to serve all people. As we respond to God’s love in this way we see the world and its people through Jesus’ eyes. Through participation in this service opportunity, student faith should be challenged and developed as the realness of Christ becomes more evident through relevant, Christ-centred worship times: “serving after the service”.
- Once a student is selected, the School/College should commit to teaching about community development in a way that goes beyond the basic ‘helping poor people’ to an in-depth understanding about the reasons for poverty and inequality in the world and the need for an integrated approach to development.

- The School/College should commit to raising funds for work overseas. It should be noted that, consistent with an integrated approach to development, not all funds necessarily go towards building projects, but could go towards teaching and training locals so that they are more empowered to live better lives and shape their own futures. It depends on the village and the development work that is taking place. This is a wonderful opportunity to teach the school community that the heart of our work is people, not things. Building people and helping them develop their God-given potential is just as important (or even more important!) as building infrastructure.

Guidelines for Student Christian learning and service tours

To protect the interests of the poor communities we partner, it is necessary to provide clear guidelines for potential visits to projects. These will be met by all individual students and their schools during participation in a Student Christian learning and service tour.

- There are incredible benefits for teams visiting overseas partner countries. These include:
 - Experience of God – students and staff see Christ’s love in action through the staff, and meet Jesus in those in need
Educational – learning beyond what could ever be experienced in a classroom
 - Change of world view – students are challenged with what they may think or believe about the world
 - Change of heart – poverty touches people in a way that reaches straight to the heart
 - Change in understanding of reasons for inequality – students are met with the reality of inequality and injustice and see the difficulty in making real change.
- A student visiting an overseas country cannot be the sole focus of the school’s participation with ALWS as this experience will only be for one or a small number of students. Ideally, the School/College should remain committed to supporting other ALWS programs (like Awareness Week and Awareness Days), rather than focusing just on that country and making sure that the whole school community is involved.
- To avoid the danger of ‘poverty tourism’ to both visitors and the visited, the focus must be on creating a learning opportunity that permeates the whole school community.
- No “items” (e.g. clothing, computers, sports equipment) will be sent to the community via shipping containers or other transport methods. This is because ALWS focus on long-term community development that empowers the people to improve their own lives while still remaining true to their culture. Many items that Australians see as important to take overseas can be bought in-country, thereby supporting the local economy, while other items are simply not needed, wanted, or usable, in a poverty situation. In addition, transportation costs both to the country and in-country can be very high. This money would be better used to contribute to real development initiatives in the community.
- Staff and students on a Christian service tour may choose to buy items ‘in country’ if they had extra money AND they have spoken to in-country staff to find out what actual needs are.
- Students and teachers on Christian service tours may choose to take items (e.g. soccer balls or small activities) to help them interact with the local people. This is acceptable, but participants must be mindful NOT to encourage a ‘whites have more to give’ mentality.
- To maximise the benefit of the visit, and ensure good practice culturally and safety-wise, all students and staff must undergo extensive education in many areas, including:

- Christian basis of ALWS action
 - World poverty issues
 - Aid and development issues
 - The history of the country
 - Current country challenges and events
 - ALWS work in the country
 - Travelling to developing countries
- An integral part of their being selected to visit would be a commitment to come back to the college the following year and share, teach and inspire others about their experiences – and their on-going action to serve those in need. This may include speaking to students in other schools and visiting churches etc.
 - Staff must be prepared to spend time with the students before the trip in learning and preparation, and afterwards in debriefing. They would travel as a close-knit team, and must be willing to live and travel simply in a cross-cultural situation and be able to contribute positively to a small group. Preference should be given to students who are prepared and able to share their experiences with others to make sure the School/College makes the most of the opportunity.
 - To enhance the worship of the school community, school chaplains (ordained and lay), or staff willing to lead worship are encouraged to go on any overseas service trip.
 - The number of students and teachers travelling would depend on the country and how many people the village/aid agency could support.
 - ALL costs of a touring group must be met by the team. All participants in the team should find the money for the trip themselves and be involved in significant fundraising for the people overseas – at least as much again as the total personal cost of their visit. This develops a greater sense of achievement and participants gain more by learning from people who really are poor.
 - Travel insurance will be organised by ALWS through the LCA insurance cover.
 - Passports and visas will need to be organised and paid for by each participant (ALWS staff will help in the organisation).
 - While ALWS (and our overseas partners) will offer support at every opportunity, we can't be held accountable for any unforeseen problem that may arise.
 - All team participants must sign the ALWS Code of Conduct relating to the treatment of people overseas (e.g. protocols connected with taking photos and child safety protocols).

ALWS Commitment to all schools

- The Christian learning and service tour focus will be one nominated by the ALWS Program Staff as a result of discussion with the involved community. It will be consistent with and help meet the objectives of the overall program. On the Students Christian learning and service tour, where students go and what they are involved in is driven by the Program staff. In other words, it will be community-driven, not donor-driven.

- ALWS Awareness Week each year provides excellent teaching resources and action options for schools, and is ideal for schools wanting to teach their students about real world issues. The school can use Awareness Week to increase their students' knowledge about developing countries, issues in those countries and what 'development' really is.
- ALWS Awareness Day provides an excellent opportunity for students (and staff) to learn about and be challenged in their understanding of global poverty issues, and be inspired to make a difference in the world. School/College participation in Awareness Days is strongly encouraged. If the School/College is not in close proximity to an Awareness Day, staff are strongly encouraged to run their own Awareness Day with support from ALWS staff. Students who have had the opportunity to travel overseas on Christian service tours will be encouraged to lead activities for other students during Awareness Days.
- ALWS will provide the school with updated materials, and are available to visit your School/College during the year. ALWS staff are keen to help and support teachers throughout the year as needed.
- ALWS have many excellent resources available for teachers to use, downloadable from their new website www.alws.org.au.

Where to Now?

If this is something that you school would like to pursue:

Please contact Susan Seng at ALWS to discuss possibilities (details below).

We look forward to working together with Lutheran schools from around Australia!

Susan

Susan Seng

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