

Dominican Republic

Service Immersion Handbook 2026



**SALVE REGINA
UNIVERSITY**

Center for Community Engagement and Service
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[Facebook.com/SalveCommunityService](https://www.facebook.com/SalveCommunityService)

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History of Salve's Partnership with Mustard Seed

In August 2012, The Center for Community Engagement and Service at Salve Regina University sponsored the first service immersion abroad to Nicaragua. While in Nicaragua and working with Mustard Seed Organization, student volunteers were able to help serve the community by building and playing with the local children. On this first immersion, 16 students participated and raised \$15,200 for Mustard Seed Organization.

The Center for Community Engagement and Service has been able to sustain the Nicaragua service immersion abroad because of the growing interests from the Salve students. This Nicaragua Service immersion is the reason why the Jamaica immersion evolved and now the Dominican Republic Service Immersion. This January 2026 will be the Fourth Dominican Republic Service Immersion.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students who participate with The Center for Community Engagement and Service program will:

- Develop leadership and communication skills and strengthen self-confidence
- Develop critical thinking about social issues
- Develop a life-long sense of civic responsibility
- Work and communicate effectively across differences
- Plan and implement community-based service activities or programs
- Integrate the values of service and social justice into career and life goals
- Use reflection as a means for learning and personal growth

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Dominican Republic Service Immersion

January 10-17th 2026

Service Immersion Description

The Dominican Republic Service Immersion is run through the Mustard Seed Communities, an organization that works with the local Catholic Church to serve the needs of abandoned or orphaned children with mental and physical disabilities. Hogar Immanuel is home to almost fifty children and young adults with disabilities in the Dominican Republic.

Mustard Seed Communities (MSC) is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to caring for the most vulnerable populations in society. MSC began in 1978 as a home for children with disabilities on the outskirts of Kingston, Jamaica. They have since expanded and built additional facilities in the Dominican Republic, Zimbabwe, and Nicaragua in 1999. The majority of their programs are dedicated to the care of children with serious physical and mental disabilities such as Down syndrome, hydrocephalus, cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy. MSC also cares for children affected by HIV/AIDS in Jamaica and Zimbabwe. In Jamaica, they have a home for teenage mothers and their babies. The vision for each apostolate is to create a loving and caring environment to aid in the physical, mental and spiritual development of their residents. In Nicaragua, Hogar Belen Managua opened in 2000 and is currently home to over 35 children ranging in ages from infants to adolescents. Hogar Belen Diriamba opened in 2006 and is home to over 40 children and young adults.

In addition to caring for their residents, MSC is involved in numerous outreach and community development initiatives in the countries where they serve. MSC employs over 300 local workers, offering jobs, training and economic viability to people who would otherwise have no opportunity to break out of the cycle of poverty. MSC strives to introduce skills into the community and to empower its people. MSC is working towards helping their apostolates become fully self-sufficient through sustainable agriculture. The hope is that this will improve the quality of life for their residents while fostering a sense of responsibility within the local community.

Mission Statement of Mustard Seed Communities:

“Inspired by the healing and caring Ministry of Jesus Christ, we aim through the positive interaction of caring, sharing and training, to uplift the most vulnerable members of society, especially handicapped and abandoned children, and marginalized communities. We are committed to the fostering of homes and communities, which will lead us all too loving service and mutual respect and which will bring us joy, hope and dignity.”

Details from Mustard Seed about the children, packing lists, and fundraising:

<https://www.mustardseed.com/>

Dominican Republic Service Immersion 2026 Timeline

- ✓ **Applications Due: September 30th at Noon online**
- ✓ **Applicant Reviews/Selection: Week of September 30**
- ✓ **Notification of Acceptance Offer to participants: Week of September 30**
- ✓ ***Notification from participants if they decline acceptance offer (told to us by): October 7***
- ✓ **One-on-one meetings with Director of Center for Community Engagement and Service: October 8-10th**
- ✓ **Special Forms Due: October 28 (participant agreement form)**
- ✓ **Estimated \$950 Airfare Down-Payment:** Due to the SRU Business Office before October 31
- ✓ **Fundraising:** Accounts Released October 31 to Mustard Seed Website. (Participants must have a detailed plan of how they are going to fundraise the \$1,200)
- ✓ **October 30** - First Dominican Republic group meeting, from 5-6pm (Topic: Immersion overview & team building)
- ✓ **November 12** -2nd Dominican Republic group meeting, from 5-6pm (Topic: Q&A of immersion details)
- ✓ **November 19, 2025:**
 - ✓ **Waivers:** Fill out your Salve Regina University Service Immersion Code of Conduct paper
 - ✓ **Copy of passport:** Make sure to turn in a **colored copy** of your passport to Center for Community Engagement and Service or emailed to Community.Services@Salve.edu
 - ✓ **Your \$600 minimum down-payment** is due to Mustard Seed Website (First Installment).
- ✓ **December 3rd** -3rd Dominican Republic group meeting, from 5-6pm (Topic: donations and packing)
- ✓ **Vaccinations Due: December 9th** - All of your vaccinations must be completed. Generally, a current Tetanus Shot, Hepatitis A, and Hepatitis B are required. Check: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/dominican-republic?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-leftnav-traveler
- ✓ **December 19:** Your total fundraising payment of **\$1,200** for your Dominican Republic Service Immersion is due to the Mustard Seed Website. **(If you do not complete this fundraising, you cannot go on immersion.**
- ✓ **December 19:** – Participants who decide to bring a suitcase packed full of donations, please make sure all forms are completed before this date.
- ✓ **January 8, 2026** – 4th Dominican Republic group meeting, via Zoom from 5-6pm; pre immersion participant question survey online (Topic: final questions)
- ✓ **Service Immersion: January 10-17, 2026**
- ✓ **Dominican Republic Service Immersion Reunion:** Spring 2026 (TBD)

Money Matters

Financial Information: *Please note that the following figures are estimates only and are computed using the current exchange rate. We believe them to be reasonable estimates but reserve the right to change the fees should the flight rate change.*

***All students will pay a \$950 (estimated) airfare before December 2025 and fundraise \$1,200 online through the Mustard Seed Communities.**

The Program fee of \$2,000 includes:

- Round-trip air fare Boston/PVD to DR estimated
- Round trip van transportation from Salve campus to airport
- 7 nights lodging (Students and faculty will be housed at Mustard Seed Communities in a dorm style mission cottage on the campus.)
- All in country transportation, and airport fees.
- Most meals in country (not including travel days in airport and recreational day in DR).
- Project construction materials
- 24/7 Bilingual Mustard Seed Communities staff

Students outside anticipated cost:

- All recreation, cultural, and tourist activities (previous cost was about \$50 per person).
- Airport food on travel days (January 10 and January 17).
- Personal Doctor vaccinations
- Personal Passports
- You also may to bring an additional \$80-\$120 (in small dollar bill amounts) of personal spending money for any souvenirs you purchase when you go to the markets.

Financial Assistance: Students can send a letter of request and are required to meet one-on-one to request financial assistance, with the Director of Center for Community Engagement and Service. Financial assistance will only be given to cover partial cost of the flight cost. No financial assistance will be given to the Mustard Seed \$1,200 fundraising portion of the Immersion. Financial Assistance will be given on a case by case basis.

How to pay for my flight: The \$950 (estimated) airfare down payment is due before December through the Business Office at Salve Regina University. Students can pay the business office by VISA, MasterCard or by electronic check through their portal.

The Mustard Seed Fundraising: All participants will create a personal account on the Mustard Seed Communities webpage. By September participants will be given a team passcode to register and start their personal profile.

- All donations to Mustard Seed Communities will be tax deductible.

- If a donor mails you a check for your personal fundraising account, make sure to have them make the check payable to Mustard Seed Communities with your name in the memo line. You, as the participating student, will later mail all deposits to Mustard Seed Communities headquarters. Details will follow regarding address.
- Remember to mail personal thank you cards to your donors.
- For more information on your personal Mustard Seed fundraising account a personal link will be given to you.

Refund policy: the estimated \$950 flight deposit is not refundable under any circumstance. The Mustard Seed Fundraising of \$1,200 is also non-refundable.

**To be an eligible participant on the Dominican Republic Service Immersion all students must adhere to the timeline application process, and have all required documents submitted on time. You will receive an electronic notification of all completed requirements to confirm your place on the Immersion.*

Passports

Passports: Give yourself plenty of time! The process can take a couple months in the heavy tourist season. Applications are available at most Post Offices and some County clerk offices, or visit: <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>. Follow the instructions on the application carefully. You will need:

- two recent identical 2" x 2" pictures (full face, front view)
- full payment of passport cost
- an official birth certificate with a 'raised seal.' If this is not available, a baptismal record or an affidavit from someone who knows when and where you were born, or a census record may be submitted.

The Center for Community Engagement and Service will need a copy of your colored passport before November 2025 emailed to Community.Services@Salve.edu

Health, Wellness, and Safety

Please be advised that this immersion involves a significant level of physical activity. We will be doing ALL of the activities ourselves (in collaboration with Mustard Seed Communities!) and will also be doing a fair amount of walking and using non-handicapped accessible buildings and vehicles. You must be physically fit and in good health to take this course – unfortunately, Dominican Republic does not have an equivalent to the American Disability Act making universal accommodations for those with mobility disabilities. We are staying at a local residence, maintaining our own living quarters, preparing the majority of our food, and all living quarters will be shared. The bathrooms are not handicapped accessible. Please remember that we focus on being ‘guests’, integrating ourselves into the community, and will avoid, to the extent possible, being ‘tourists’.

Health Information: As with travel to any developing nation, we will need to take certain health precautions to ensure that our trip is healthy and safe.

- **Immunizations:** Generally, a current Tetanus Shot, Hepatitis A, and Hepatitis B are required. Check https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/dominican-republic?s_cid=ncezid-dgmg-travel-leftnav-traveler or ask your personal physician for additional immunization recommendations. Please note that some vaccines are a series of shots, so plan accordingly. You must pay for any personal Doctor immunizations.
- **Water:**
 - *Mustard Seed Communities uses bottled water exclusively for drinking and cooking. We will have an abundance of bottled water available for our use.*
- **Health Insurance Information:**
 - We must have the name of your health insurance provider with all appropriate policy numbers. It is the responsibility of the student to provide for the treatment of pre-existing conditions, such as allergy shots.
- **Medical treatment provided in-country:**
 - We will use a well and widely recommended physician at the local medical clinic. More serious illnesses or emergencies will be treated at the regional hospital. Our cost does not include the cost of medical attention that may be required during the program. Often physicians abroad do not accept insurance.
- **Safety Precautions**
 - When traveling overseas, there are a number of precautions that you should follow in order to travel safely. You should also consult the US State Department Travel advisories that we will continually refer to throughout this pre-departure briefing. Travel advisories are available by country at: http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html. We suggest you visit this site frequently for updates.

Travel Tips

- Be cognizant of your surroundings.
- Do not carry large sums of money or place all of your money and credit cards in the same place. Do not place your wallet in your back pocket as this is the easiest target for pickpockets.
- In some countries, taking pictures of government, security and transportation facilities is not allowed.
- Trust your instincts, if something doesn't look or feel right, avoid it.
- Do not leave sensitive documents or equipment unattended out in the open in your room.

Especially for women:

- Research your destination to understand its customs, views and laws pertaining to women.
- Women travelers should pack feminine hygiene supplies as these can be hard to find or ill packaged in certain locations. Toilet paper and sanitary wipes may be useful as well.
- Women should consider using inconspicuous luggage that does not denote affluence or femininity.
- Women should use a purse with an inner zippered pocket and a strap that is too thick to be easily cut. Wear the strap across the body, against the stomach.
- Use local women as a guide for appropriate dress. Avoid revealing clothing as this could bring unwanted attention or problems in more conservative countries.

Packing List for Dominican Republic

WHAT TO PACK: A backpack or duffel bag is easiest to carry. Please do not over-pack. You may also want a separate (drawstring bag) to hold an extra shirt, water bottle, camera, etc. You will not have a place to lock up your belongings during the immersion, so it is suggested you limit what valuables you bring to those which can be carried in your day pack (a small drawstring backpack is fine).

CLOTHES: The weather during January can range from high 70s at night and up to 90s during the day. Shorts, jeans, lightweight shirts, and a jacket or sweatshirt for layering are best. You will need clothes and shoes which can get dirty at service projects. *Anything you pack, you can donate on the last day!!

- 2-3 outfits for service projects (these may get dirty).
- 1-2 Salve T-shirts (for group pictures)
- 1 long-sleeved shirt or sweatshirt
- 1-2 pairs of shorts
- 1 pair of closed-toe shoes for service projects/ropes course (sneakers) **Again, these may get dirty.**
- 1 pair of shower sandals
- Swimsuit & Beach Towel (for the day at the lagoon)
- 1 Rain Jacket or Poncho

TOILETRIES (Airplane size)

- Toothbrush/Toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Soap
- Shampoo/conditioner
- Medications
- Contacts/case/solutions
- 1 Roll of Toilet Paper

LINENS (*We will be sleeping indoors on bunk beds & blankets will be provided)

GEAR: ESSENTIAL

- Sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher)
- Mosquito Repellent
- 2 Personal Water Bottles
- Sunglasses/hat
- Additional Copies of your passport
- Small \$\$\$ bills (Ex: \$1/\$5/\$10) for touring day

OPTIONAL

- Camera
- Cell phone (USE OF CELL PHONES WILL BE **VERY LIMITED**)
- 1 Flashlight

What to leave at home:

- Laptops, iPods, etc.

Pre-Immersion Meetings

*All participants are required to attend the 4 pre-immersion meetings before going on the Dominican Republic Service Immersion. No exceptions will be granted.

- ✓ **October**- First group meeting, from 5-6pm (Topic: Immersion overview & team building)
- ✓ **November** -2nd group meeting, from 5-6pm (Topic: Q&A immersion details)
- ✓ **December** -3rd group meeting, from 5-6pm (Topic: donations and packing)
- ✓ **January** - 4th group meeting, from 5-6pm; Pre-Immersion participant survey online (Topic: donations and packing up suitcases)

Frequently Asked Questions

What can I expect from a mission immersion to Mustard Seed Communities?

Mustard Seed Communities has hosted short term mission immersions since 1993. They have established a highly developed program for volunteers which is based upon meaningful interaction with our children; tangible work projects; and participation in an inclusive Christian community.

Mustard Seed Communities' mission program exposes volunteers to the reality of poverty in the developing world and is deeply grounded in spirituality. Our Catholic based program provides opportunities for daily prayer, adoration, and reflection while at the same time maintains an ecumenical approach.

What makes a Mustard Seed Communities' mission immersion unique?

Mustard Seed Communities cares for children who are disabled, forgotten, abandoned, and marginalized. Our children reflect the image and likeness of God just as you do. So when you look into a child's face or feel the gentle touch of a child's hand, know that God is also touching you and looking at you through their eyes. They in turn are seeing you for who you really are and God's presence in you.

Who participates in Mustard Seed Communities' mission immersions?

Mission Immersions are available to anyone who is at least 15 years old and willing to step outside of their "comfort zone" to follow God's call. They are open to people of all faith denominations. Groups from colleges, universities, high schools, and parishes participate; teens and adults from 15 years old to 80. No prior experience is needed; most mission volunteers are people who have never tried anything like this before.

What safety measures are in place to protect mission volunteers?

In addition to a driver and security personnel who travel with the group, a mission representative supervises all volunteer activities and stays with the mission group as well. All homes are secured and gated and have security 24 hours a day. The safety of our mission groups is our first priority.

What is the financial commitment to participate in a mission immersion?

It is required that all mission volunteers to raise a minimum of \$1,200.00 per person excluding airfare. Many groups and individuals set goals that far exceed the minimum requirement. Mustard Seed Communities provides fundraising ideas, methods and materials that will help you exceed your goals.

How do I fundraise?

Social Media! Many volunteers create a Facebook page to help fundraise. Some volunteers Facebook message their friends and family, send emails and letters to their local parishes and high school teachers from home. Calling works too!

How are the sleeping accommodations?

Participants will work with children and young adults while staying in a dorm-style mission cottage on the campus in bunk beds. Mustard Seed provides all participants with a pillow and bed sheet. All males and females will be in separate living quarters. Participants can choose to bring their own mosquito nets if desired.

What will the weather be like in DR?

The weather during January can range from high 70s at night and up to 90s during the day. Shorts, jeans, lightweight shirts, and a jacket or sweatshirt for layering are best. You will need clothes and shoes which can get dirty at service projects. *Anything you pack, you can donate on the last day!!

What are my options on getting to the airport?

Participants have the option of taking a Salve shuttle from campus to and from the Airport. Or participants also have the option of being dropped off at the Airport on the morning of departure and being picked up on the day the group returns.

How will we communicate to our families when we are on the service immersion?

Participants may use their personal international cell phone plan while on the immersion. However, we highly suggest participants to “live in the moment” and enjoy the immersion without looking at their phones 24/7. A group cell phone with limited minutes will only be used for emergency situations.

How many students are selected for the immersion?

There is a 10 student capacity for the Service Immersion due to the dorm style setting where the group sleeps.

How does the waitlist work?

The waitlist will be activated after any original participants have not paid their airfare down payment or if people have decided to drop out. Waitlist participants are always emailed regarding their change in status if anything happens.

Sample Schedule

Daily Schedule HBD

5:00 am	Rise morning preparations
7:00 am	Breakfast/ clean kitchen, dining area
8:00 am	Class, daily chores and activities
11:30 am	Lunch/ clean kitchen, dining area
1:00 pm	Class for the older children
2:00 pm	Recreation activities for small children
3:30 pm	Reflection
4:00 pm	Dinner/ clean kitchen, dining area
4:30 pm	Recreation Activities
7:00 pm	Bed time

Saturday

10:30 am	Basic Orientation
11:30 am	Bed time

Sunday

6:30 am	Rise morning preparations
7:30 am	Breakfast/ clean kitchen, dining area
8:20 am	Go to Mass at San Jose Church
12:00 pm	Lunch /clean kitchen, dining area
2:00 pm	Spend time with the children
5:30 pm	Clean up
6:00 pm	Dinner
7:00 pm	Cleanup of kitchen/dining area
8:00 pm	Community Time –Reflection

Monday

6:30 am	Rise, morning preparations
7:30 am	Breakfast/clean kitchen, dining area
08:30 am	Depart to HBM
09:30 am	Start work project
12:00 pm	Lunch /clean kitchen, dining area
01:00 pm	Resume Projects
2:45 pm	Spend time with the children
4:30 pm	Depart to HBD
5:30 pm	Clean up
6:00 pm	Dinner
7:00 pm	Clean-up of kitchen/dining area
8:00 pm	Community Time –Reflection

Tuesday

6:30 am	Rise, morning preparations
7:30 am	Breakfast/clean kitchen, dining are
08:30 am	Depart to HBM
09:30 am	Start work project
2:45 pm	Spend time with the children

4:30 pm Depart to HBD
5:30 pm Clean up
6:00 pm Dinner
7:00 pm Clean-up of kitchen/dining area
8:00 pm Community Time –Reflection

Wednesday

6:30 am Rise, morning preparations
7:30 am Breakfast/clean kitchen, dining area
9:00 am Reflection with staff and children
09:30 am Help staff and children with chores
12:00 pm Lunch /clean kitchen, dining area
2:00 pm Spend time with the children
5:30 pm Clean up
6:00 pm Dinner
7:00 pm Clean-up of kitchen/dining area
8:00 pm Community Time –Reflection

Thursday

6:30 am Rise, morning preparations
7:30 am Breakfast
9:00 am Depart for DAY OUT
(Have lunch and Dinner out)
9:00 pm Return to Diriamba).

Friday

6:30 am Rise, morning preparations
7:30 am Breakfast
9:30 am Depart to CIGM, Managua
1:30 pm Lunch at HBD
3:30 pm Mass
4:30 pm Spend time with the children
6:30 pm Dinner
7:30 pm Clean-up of kitchen/dining area
8:30 pm Community Time –Reflection

Saturday

3:00 am Rise morning preparations
3:45 am Good byes and depart to airport
American Airlines Flight-# 994 leave at 8:00 am

Please bring: snacks, mosquito nets, bug spray, sun block, peanut butter, sunglasses, face mask and closed toe shoes.

HBM: HOGAR BELEN MANAGUA

HBD: HOGAR BELEN DIRIAMBA

Created by:

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