

## DR 2015 Mission Trip

### Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta GA

#### Notes for Team Members on Using Smartphones and Laptops

*These notes are based on my experiences in using smartphones and laptops in the Dominican Republic on fourteen trips since June 2010, including five of Christ Church's mission trips. My most recent trip was in April 2015. I am assuming conditions in June 2015 will be the same as in April 2015, but of course that is not certain.*

*I regret the length of this document, but the subject is complicated, difficult to summarize, and has financial implications. Failure to plan properly for international use can incur steep financial charges.– Julius Ariail*

The question of whether or not to take a smartphone or a laptop on a mission trip is one that can only be answered by each individual mission trip member. In general, they are not necessary for the successful outcome of the mission trip. As a part of my mission team assignment, I will have a smartphone (809-653-0433) and laptop fully equipped for international use, and can relay emergency text, email, and voice messages to any team member and facilitate emergency communications from the DR back to family members in the US. Contact information for me while team is in the DR: text or voice to 809-653-0433, email to jarial@bellsouth.net.

These devices should be brought on the trip only if needed for other, individual reasons. If a team member decides to bring them, then that team member has to make provisions to secure them at all times, to re-charge them, and to connect them to the Internet if those communication functions are desired. Misplacing a smartphone or any other expensive electronic item while on the trip tends to be disruptive, especially if the team is in transit from place to place and needs to maintain a certain schedule. If they are brought, a recommended practice is to secure them with a passcode so the device cannot be used by another person if found. In general, these devices may attract unwanted attention from others and are considered "attractive nuisances." Necessary precautions must be taken.

One popular use of smartphones on a mission trip is to use them as cameras. In this case, communications arrangements are not necessary while in the DR, so the smartphones can be left in "airplane mode" for the entire trip to function as a camera and photo file storage device. In "airplane mode," no data is transmitted or received, and so there are no data charges.

One communication method that is also free to use is wifi. We expect that there will be a reliable wifi network in the hotel we will be using in Santo Domingo for the night of June 21. At the Campamento in El Pedregal, wifi will probably not be

available. If it is available, it may only be for an hour or so each day, and the signal strength may be weak. We will not know if wifi is available until we arrive, and even then it may be on a day-to-day availability basis. While using wifi, the smartphone should be set to “airplane mode + wifi” to block any cell phone data usage during that time so as to avoid international charges.

In the event that one elects to use the full capabilities of a smartphone for voice, text messaging, email messaging, and “web surfing” while in the DR, then one should contact the smartphone’s US-based carrier network to purchase an international voice, or voice & data plan before leaving the US. If this is not done in advance, and if the smartphone is used to connect for voice calls and/or data transmissions while in the DR, the costs can be extremely high – perhaps in the thousands of US dollars for the week if one uses the device heavily for tasks like photo uploads and downloads or extensive web surfing. Charges for international voice, text messaging, and data plans vary by carrier and also by the amount of time (voice calls), number of text messages, and amount of data. These amounts are purchased in advance. If the full amount purchased is not used during the trip, any remaining amount is forfeited. In the event one’s usage is over the amount purchased, then those overages may be charged at the full, non-discounted rate.

Good battery life practices while using these international voice and data plans include turning off all unnecessary apps that use data such as location services; “zeroing out” voice and data usage meters as one leaves the US so that accurate usage records can be maintained on the smartphone while in the DR; restricting the number and resolution sizes of photo uploads; and switching to “airplane mode” whenever the device is powered up but connectivity is not needed at the moment. Methods of doing these vary by smartphone manufacturer, so if in doubt consult an online manual for a specific type of equipment. Be sure to do this consultation while in the US, since these online manual consultations while in the DR will count against one’s data allowance.