

leader's
resource



jim burns

uncommon missions & service projects

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introduction

It has often been said that more Christian education takes place during a couple of weekend service projects or even one missions project than during an entire year of Sunday School. The reason you probably picked up this resource is because you recognize this and know how important service and missions project experiences can be to the spiritual growth of your students. Mike DeVries has brought together a plethora of outstanding and practical ideas for missions and service projects. As I read over every sentence, I continued to get excited that you have available to you practical ideas from some of America's finest youth workers on subjects you will definitely be able to use. Better yet, the experiences in this book have already been used with students, and they worked!

If you are new to youth work, then you will appreciate the practical how-tos this book has to offer. If you are a veteran, I know you will enjoy being able to find a new handle on the important information in this book. Thank you, my fellow youth worker, for your continued influence in the lives of students. Who knows—one of these experiences may be just the thing that turns a student's life toward God and makes an eternal difference. Thanks for your commitment to kids and families.

Yours in Christ,

Jim Burns, Ph.D.

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THE GROUNDWORK

groundwork: \ˈgraund-wark\ **1:** foundation, basis **2:** preparation made beforehand.

The purpose in offering service and missions opportunities to your students is to draw them closer to Christ and enable them to show Christ's love to others. Although good works alone do not glorify God, creating a mindset that serving others is a form of worship will honor God and allow you to participate in furthering His kingdom. The quality of your work will also speak of your devotion to God; so good planning will be key to creating a quality experience for your students and those they serve. To this end, the following section will help you walk through the process of preparing to serve others in Jesus' name.

being missions- minded



You are probably eager to dive into planning an amazing opportunity for your students to serve others. However, unless they understand why Jesus commands them to serve, the impact of the experience will be limited. So, before you begin any project planning, take the time with your students to dig into God's Word and see what Jesus says about why it is so important to reach out to others with His love. With this biblical foundation, your service opportunities can transform your students' lives and make them effective witnesses to others.

mandate for service and missions

In Matthew 25:31-40, Jesus told a parable to His listeners to explain the importance of serving others and being missions-minded:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."



As this parable shows, the work we do among the needy, the hungry, the lonely, the sick and those rejected by society is an expression of our love for Christ. Yes, we are helping to meet people's needs, but what will set us apart is that we are doing it as an act of love for Christ, the one who has met our needs and is worthy of our worship. Our service will draw those we help closer to Jesus and will open opportunities for us to share His saving love with them.

Later, in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gave His disciples what has become known as the Great Commission, telling them to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” With this commission, He promised to be with them always, even to the end of the age. Our service is an act of worship, love and obedience. Conveying this concept to our students will transform our efforts of service into supernatural acts of love.

our mission field

We see this truth in Acts 1:8. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples that it would be through the power of the Holy Spirit that they would be witnesses for Him: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses.” We must cover our efforts in prayer and prepare our participants to share their faith as God gives them opportunities while serving. The Holy Spirit is available to every servant who has accepted Jesus as his or her Savior and Lord. This verse also gives a method for fulfilling the Great Commission: “You will be my witnesses in *Jerusalem*, and in all *Judea* and *Samaria*, and to the *ends of the earth*” (emphasis added). “Jerusalem,” “Judea,” “Samaria” and “the ends of the earth” can represent the different types of mission fields that we have today.

jerusalem

“Jerusalem” represents the local church family. For your students, this is a great place to start in getting them actively involved in serving others. Participating in these experiences will allow them to evaluate their faith and heart for service. It can also help your students feel connected to their local church.

judea

In Jesus' day, Judea represented the surrounding Jewish community in which the disciples lived. For your students, their “Judea” would be their community—their schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, clubs or sports

activities. Projects in the community will allow your students opportunities to be lights in their own world and will give them experience in sharing their faith with non-Christians.

samaria

Samaria was a culture close to Israel, but had distinct differences from the Jewish community in Judea. Their paths sometimes crossed, but they rarely interacted because of the differences in their religious beliefs and practices. For your students, “Samaria” can represent a culture in your area that is outside of their experience. This culture could be a group of immigrants, a Native American reservation, a Jewish synagogue, foreign exchange students, a mosque, or migrant workers. Serving these groups of people will open your students’ eyes to their needs, help them understand and respond positively to cultural differences, and inspire them to see that the love of Christ can cross all cultural barriers. Students that have these cross-cultural experiences often embrace the opportunity to participate in serving Christ abroad.

the ends of the earth

Once students have had the opportunity to serve those in their church, in their communities and in other cultures at home, they may begin to look for ways to serve Christ in countries overseas. Nothing will test, refine and grow their faith in Christ more than the excitement and challenge of a short-term missions experience. The information in the missions projects section will help you create these unforgettable experiences that will build your students’ faith and impact the world for Christ.

motivating young people to serve

Hundreds of young people have participated in service and missions projects. The majority of these young people experienced a profound life change because of what God did in them by serving others. This is one of the most important reasons for offering young people opportunities to be involved in service and missions, and it begins by creating a heart for missions in your youth group. The goal is for the concept of serving others to become a natural extension of your youth program. The following are some ways to set the tone and motivate your young people to serve.

model service and missions

The apostle Paul said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Young people are watching and following





your example. If you want your students to become excited about serving others, you need to model this for them. When you volunteer in the community, become a member of rotary clubs, and work with food banks or at residential care homes, you become a living example of serving others with Christ's love. Share your experiences and what you are learning with your students. Invite a few of the group members to join you as you serve. Through your example, you can create a spark, and your students will catch the fire.

help young people develop a servant's heart

Many of the young people we work with are growing up in an environment that promotes self-indulgence. As our young people mature in their Christian faith, we must help them face the fact that God's ways are different than the world's ways. The world will tell them to look out for "Number One," but the call of Christ is the call to serve others. After all, it was Christ who announced that His purpose for coming to this world was to serve others—ultimately by giving His life: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). We have a responsibility to help students look past themselves. We must help them to develop a compassionate servant's heart for their friends, relatives, neighbors and even those they do not know living in other countries.

The best way to begin this process is to show them God's heart for the lost in the Bible. Take a look at how Jesus responded to the needs around Him and His purpose in meeting those needs. Walk your students through Paul's missionary journeys in Acts. Examine what God's Word says about salvation, sharing Christ and serving others. You can use the following verses to prepare your group to begin serving others. Each passage teaches a different aspect of what it means to have a servant's heart.

- Being a light to the world: 1 John 1:5-2:11
- Showing compassion: Matthew 9:35-38
- Empowerment of the Holy Spirit: Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:19-31; Acts 1:8
- Faith and deeds: James 2:14-26
- Following Jesus' example: John 13:1-17
- Importance of serving: Luke 10:38-42
- Jesus' heart for the lost: Luke 7:36-50; 19:1-10
- Perils of showing favoritism: Luke 10:25-37; James 2:1-13
- Relating and communicating the gospel: John 4:1-42

- Relying on God: Hebrews 13:1-21
- Serving “the least of these”: Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:22-27
- Serving with humility: Philippians 2:1-16

Ask your students to look for ways they can serve the needs of others as they go about their daily activities. Have them keep a prayer list of these needs and examine what it would take to meet them. Many of these prayer concerns can become opportunities for service. Your students will be more willing to serve when they are invested in identifying the opportunities.

create an awareness of service and missions

Many students have a distorted view of service and missions. They may believe that it means selling off all their possessions, or wearing ugly cast-off clothes, or flying to the jungles of Africa to proclaim the Word of God to a village of naked people.

As youth leaders, we need to clear up these misconceptions and help students realize they can serve wherever they are. The way to do this is by teaching regularly on the topics of service and missions. Weave the message of Jesus’ call to make disciples and follow His example in service into everything you do.

A great way to start is by bringing in exciting and relevant guest speakers whom you have already screened. These could be missionaries (past or present), group members who have participated in a service project or short-term missions trip, or workers from local ministries to the poor, such as a food bank, foster care program or homeless shelter. Or, you could expose your students to one of the many inspirational films on service in the community or in missions that are available today. Short clips are often available on the websites of different community and missions organizations. (See the resources section of this book for ideas.)

Another way to expose your students to the needs around them is to take them to the inner city and show them firsthand how people live in poverty. This will allow them to experience a culture that is very different from their home life and open their eyes to the problems of those living around them. This can be a powerful experience for them that will prompt them to take an active role in volunteering or seeking other ways to help those in need.

build a core group

When it comes time to plan your first service and/or missions project, don’t bite off more than you can chew. Most of the time, it is best to start





small. A wise first project could include a brief trip to a rest home or a visit to a local soup kitchen. Remember that many students are nervous about something that is new and different and won't want to participate. Don't worry if there is not a large turnout—take those who are interested in getting involved. Once the young people have experienced serving others firsthand, they will spread the joy and excitement to the rest of the group and spark the interest of their peers. This group of students can become the foundation for successful service and missions experiences for your group as they move into positions of peer leadership.