SERVICE LEARNING FIELD GUIDE

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for the SALLT Project at Trinity Lutheran College
Service Learning Field Guide
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HOw To USE THIS FIELD GUIDE

Goals of the Service Learning Field Guide

The purpose of this resource is to:

1. Teach the four-step service learning process (Preparation, Action, Reflection, Celebration) as a guide for creating meaningful service experiences.
2. Inspire youth and adults to engage in service and mission experiences that address expressed needs of individuals and communities and, in doing so, fulfill the biblical call to service and justice.
3. Provide useful tools and resources to leaders of service experiences that can be appropriately adapted for local use.
4. Encourage transformative changes to current practices of congregational youth service activities in an effort to renew the Church’s sense of service, mission, and outreach.

Using the Service Learning Field Guide

Each section of the service learning process (Preparation, Action, Reflection, Celebration) contains numerous ideas and examples of “what to do” at each stage. Certainly not everything can be done, nor should be. Leaders are free to pick-and-choose items that are appropriate for their local situation and the particular service activity, always willing to adapt what is printed.

While this resource can be a helpful guide, leaders are encouraged to rely on the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct groups toward service experiences that benefit individuals or communities.

All resources and web links are current as of July 1, 2011. Our apologies for resources or websites that are not available after the Service Learning Field Guide was printed.

A Note on Language

In an effort to keep the text fresh when discussing service opportunities, this resource uses several terms interchangeably, such as “service project,” “service activity,” “servant event,” “service opportunity,” and “mission trip.”
INTRODUCTION TO SERVICE LEARNING

“It Feels Good to Serve!”

Local, regional, national, and international servant events are becoming increasingly popular within congregational youth ministry programs. In addition, the prevalence of service activities required by high schools and colleges is growing. These realities mean that thousands of young people are being given the opportunity to serve others in a full range of settings. Service projects and mission trips aren’t new to Christian churches, of course, though their prominence in recent years is notable.

And so, youth groups gather for a couple of hours to tackle a local project, embark on an overseas mission trip, and everything in between. It is exciting to see such importance placed on ministry among God’s people and in God’s creation! As a result of service experiences, young people often feel a sense of pleasure, enjoyment, satisfaction, or gratification … It feels good to serve!

At the same time, the growth of youth-oriented service projects is not without critics: There is concern that youth ministry programs offer little beyond a “traditional service project mentality” and that service opportunities are short-term, limited in scope, lack specific outcomes, are void of reflection and learning opportunities, and, in some cases, actually reinforce poor attitudes, stereotypes, habits, and behaviors. Without adequate preparation, reflection, and follow-up, the “mountain top” feelings of doing service can quickly fade and little growth is actually realized.

Service learning endeavors to create experiences that are long-lasting (even transforming!) for young people. Therefore, it is important to have a solid grasp on what service learning actually is, and how it might be different from the more familiar terms of “community service” and “volunteering.”

Defining Service Learning

Service learning has its roots in the American educational system. In the late 1800s, a handful of progressive educators sought to augment traditional classroom instruction with engaging activities and attempted to use such experiences as interdisciplinary teaching tools for children. Educational philosopher John Dewey, one of the movement’s early pioneers, “believed that a child’s education at school should develop from life experiences” and sought to teach children through familiar day-to-day encounters with their environment.

The term “service learning” was first used in the 1960s to describe a college technical training program that integrated community service with classroom learning. Over the past several

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decades, the concept of service learning has grown in use by schools, colleges, churches, and community-based organizations as a method of teaching any number of stated learning objectives. Because of this breadth of use, there is no single definition for service learning, though agreement is generally found on at least three points: service learning (1) has clear learning goals, (2) involves individuals in a service activity, and (3) utilizes structured reflection to draw learning from the experience.

For the purposes of this Service Learning Field Guide, the working definition of service learning is: An intentional experiential learning process that utilizes hands-on service and reflective thinking to provide richness and meaning to service experiences while fulfilling the biblical invitation to serve in Christ’s name.

A deeper explanation of service learning, looking at the definition’s key words and phrases:

- **Intentional experiential learning:** What better way is there to learn than actually experiencing something first-hand? Service learning experiences are planned with clear goals and learning objectives, and utilize service opportunities as the key component around which learning is realized.

- **Process:** Service learning is a process, not an event, and includes elements beyond the actual service activity, including adequate preparation and follow-up.

- **Hands-on service:** Service learning allows young people to engage in purposeful service, to “get their hands dirty” and gain first-hand knowledge of a particular community, context, or issue. Hands-on service cannot be substituted by books, videos, or broad anecdotes. With service learning, members of groups also share a common experience on which to base their reflection.

- **Reflective thinking:** Service learning employs critical thinking skills to process the service experience and as a tool for learning. Purposeful reflection provides opportunities to process the service experience and to apply those experiences to changes in personal behavior; addressing local or global issues; learning about political, social, and economic conditions and structures; developing a sense of civic responsibility; building community; asking the “big questions”; and considering longer-term service engagement.

- **Richness and meaning:** Service learning experiences can have deep and lasting impact on those who serve and those being served.

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6 Myers and Jackson, 329.
• **Biblical invitation:** Service learning in a Christian context aims to respond to the biblical call to serve others, allowing youth to apply the perspective of their Christian faith to service experiences.

• **In Christ’s name:** Service learning in a Christian context has the ultimate purpose of serving God’s people and God’s creation, in the name of Jesus Christ, with the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Youth and adults together can explore and deepen their faith, being challenged to fulfill the call of Jesus to care for others and how their lives might wholly reflect this call.

**What Service Learning is Not**

To aid in understanding the concept, it is also helpful to describe what service learning is not:

- **Service learning is not synonymous with volunteering.** The aim of service learning is not to “just go and serve.” In some cases, traditional volunteerism can actually do more harm than good: It can prolong the notion that those being served are inferior to those who serve, establishing an attitude of superiority of the “haves” over the “have nots.” Instead, service learning should honor and condone mutuality between all parties involved, taking into account the needs of those serving as well as those being served.

- **Service learning is not service and “accidental learning.”** Karen McKinney of the National Youth Leadership Council says, “A lot of service happens in the churches, but they miss the learning … Tons of churches will have kids do service … but they miss the reflection pieces. Service just becomes something good to do. The learning that comes from it is accidental.” Service learning is an *intentional*, not accidental, process for teaching and learning.

- **Service learning is not merely fulfilling curricular requirements.** Service learning has grown in popularity as a method for teaching complex concepts and engaging children and youth in the life of society. Some schools and colleges even require service learning activities as part of the curriculum. These service activities, however, are often short-term volunteer opportunities or give focus to the learning component more than the importance of serving. Caution should be exercised when using service learning as a curricular component to ensure it is well-intentioned – and it should never be used as a punishment.

- **Service learning cannot always solve complex issues.** While awareness of issues can be raised by the experience and short-term results can be realized, service learning activities cannot be understood as a short-term solution to complex issues that require longer-term engagement or substantive social change.

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The Power of Service Learning – An Example

Service Project: Forty participants travel to Mexico to build homes for migrant worker families.

A mission trip – the “old” way:
Step 1: Buy tools. Rent a van.
Step 2: Build houses in Mexico.
Step 3: Show the congregation a slide show. Serve tacos.

A mission trip – with the Service Learning model applied:
Step 1: Learn about Latino culture, including some Spanish phrases.
Step 2: Engage in meaningful community building with people going on the trip.
Step 3: Build houses. Interact with the people there. Study God’s word about serving others.
Step 4: On the trip and once home, talk about poverty, racism, housing issues … and how we are called to advocate for the poor in our world.
Step 5: Write a song, paint a picture, produce a video, and write poetry about the experience.
Step 6: Plan a worship service for the congregation. Show videos. Tell stories.
Step 7: Find ways to continue using young people’s gifts of leadership and service. Talk about what it means to serve others in daily life.
Step 8: Consider your group’s next service opportunity …

The Power of Service Learning – An Example

Service Project: Twelve teenagers serving Saturday lunch at a local soup kitchen.

Possible responses to the service project:
• I’m glad I don’t have to live like that.
• Who would eat that stuff for lunch?
• Homeless people smell funny.
• Homeless people should be more grateful for what they are given. Beggars can’t be choosers.
• It feels good to serve!

Possible responses to the service project, with adequate preparation and reflection:
• Homeless people aren’t that much different than me – they are people, too.
• All people who eat at community meals aren’t actually homeless.
• God calls us to serve those in need.
• Why are there homeless people in our community?
• What else, besides serving a meal, can be done to combat hunger in our hometown?
OUTCOMES OF SERVICE LEARNING

The Overarching Outcome: Transformed Lives

When engaged in service, young people can be transformed as they strive to live as faithful Christian people in this world. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through these experiences of unselfish service toward, with, and on behalf of others, young people are “new creations,” transformed in their Christian faith, relationships, thought processes, expressed attitudes, and future action as they live out their baptismal calling. Romans 12:2 calls Christians to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed,” an invitation to serve the Lord (not the world) in daily life.

The Six Outcomes of Service Learning

Through service learning, it is hoped that young people will continue their growth in discipleship and service and begin to display greater measures of the following six outcomes:

- **Compassion.** Youth will be called to be mature Christians who hold a deep and hopeful sense of compassion for the world and all God’s people.

- **Community.** Youth will be drawn into community, including with those they serve and those with whom they serve.

- **Advocacy.** Youth will work for justice, becoming advocates for the urgent needs of the world.

- **Lifelong servanthood.** Youth will become naturally and joyfully engaged in lifelong service to others.

- **Leadership.** Youth will desire to engage in leadership of others and will use their gifts of leadership in service to others.

- **Exploration of vocation.** Youth will explore God’s call in their life and deepen their sense of vocation.

Service learning leads to life transformation where young people grow in compassion, community, advocacy, lifelong servanthood, leadership, and exploration of vocation.
Outcome #1: Compassion

Through service learning, youth will be called to be mature Christians who hold a deep and hopeful sense of compassion for the world and all God’s people.

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates deep concern of one person to another: The Samaritan, finding a man who was beaten and left for dead, was moved with compassion and took care of the man in great need (Luke 10:33). This sense of compassion is described, literally, as “the movement of one’s innards” – something that comes from the “pit” or depth of one’s inner being. Compassion, derived from Latin (pati and cum), means “to suffer with.”9 Young people develop a deep sense of compassion when they are given an opportunity to “experience the other” and join them in moments of hurt, pain, sorrow, longing, or loneliness, or in times of joy, hope or discovery.

Compassionate Christians are filled with hope for a hurting world, believing that God is the source of compassion and comfort for those in need. Christians proclaim hope and intercede on behalf of the less fortunate, calling on the Lord for protection, provision, and purpose for others. It is important to note that compassion is not about “fixing people”; it is other-person centered and honors the experiences and the stories of those we work with and among.

Biblical references:
- Luke 15:11-32: Parable of the Prodigal Son
- Colossians 3:12-14: A call to care for each other

Outcome #2: Community

Through service learning, youth will be drawn into community, including those they serve and those with whom they serve.

Service in Jesus’ name has the ability to draw people into community. When young people serve others, they are called into relationships with others like themselves, as a call to Christian discipleship “includes a call to become a member of a new community (Mark 3:20-35; Mark 10:28).”10 Beyond a sense of mere acquaintance, this community is described as koinonia fellowship – a rich feeling of commonality and partnership. The earliest Christians were described as “having all things in common” (Acts 2:44), a fellowship made possible by the sending of God’s Holy Spirit. In some cases, a closer sense of community might involve friends and peers, an immediate family, a household, or the extended church family. Whatever the new fellowship might look like, the community continues to live in the world (not outside of it).11 Participating in service activities together can break down existing barriers, form new bonds, and provide a common experience for a developing community of youth and adults.

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Jesus calls his followers to love one another, just as we are called to love the Lord God (Mark 12:28-31). As this love is expressed to those with whom young people serve, they are drawn deeper yet into genuine community. By sharing the stories, the joys, and the pains of those with whom they are ministering, they are naturally drawn into community with them. Christian community is not formed because of similar physical traits, abilities, or lifestyles … but that a group of people share the same Lord (Galatians 3:26-28).

**Biblical references:**
- Acts 2:44-47a: The actions of the newest Christians
- Mark 3:20-35: Christ’s family are those who do his will
- Mark 12:28-34: The greatest commandments
- Galatians 3:25-28: We are all God’s children through faith

**Outcome #3: Advocacy**

*Through service learning, youth will work for justice, becoming advocates for the urgent needs of the world.*

Advocacy moves beyond servanthood. While servanthood emphasizes action and “doing,” advocacy asks the bigger, tougher questions: Why are these people sick? How is it that this park is always littered? What leads people to be homeless? Why are soup kitchens needed? In these moments, the focus is on asking questions and wrestling with the answers … not to jump to conclusions or cast an immediate judgment. While addressing such issues is not always easy, young people who have been moved with compassion will begin to question systems, policies, and societal values and norms that create oppressive structures. In essence, youth become “change agents” in the world as they take up the cause with or on behalf of others. Indeed, Jesus called his followers to work on behalf of the needy: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness … Blessed are the merciful … Blessed are the peacemakers.” (Matthew 5:1-12).

Advocacy can be seen as a progressive step beyond works of charity. Jesus himself moved past purely meeting needs to address deeper issues. With the Samaritan woman drawing water from Jacob’s well, Jesus recognized the woman’s physical needs (water to drink) and then gave attention to her emotional and spiritual self (John 4:5-26). In the same way, advocacy takes us beyond what is easily identified; it sharpens our minds to ask questions in order to discover and resolve multi-layered issues.

Advocacy is truly a form of justice. That is, a community of Christ’s servants “must show consistency between their faith, their vision, and the way this faith-vision is put into action.” Advocacy becomes faith-in-action and our faith demands an active response. “It is vitally important that Christians be involved in ministry to those who are suffering and oppressed,” Tony Campolo writes, “… But there is also truth in the belief that it does little good to minister to the victims of an evil system while doing nothing at all to change that system.”

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12 Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison, 82.
13 Hartin, 112.
justice in the form of advocacy allows youth an avenue to continue their service experience. It provides a place in which the “What next?” or “What now?” questions can be asked.

Biblical references:
- Exodus 5:1-2; 6:10-13, 28-29: Moses seeks freedom for God’s people
- Matthew 5:1-12: The Beatitudes
- John 4:5-26: Jesus meets the Samaritan woman
- James 2:14-17: Faith without works is dead

Outcome #4: Lifelong Servanthood

Through service learning, youth will become naturally and joyfully engaged in lifelong service to others.

The Christian life involves a call to lifelong servanthood. Jesus said to his followers, “Follow me,” at which they left everything behind and followed him (Matthew 4:18-22). Living a life of service in Jesus’ name might mean you are not sure what to expect, but rather you trust that Jesus will lead.

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus extends grace and favor to those who served their fellow brothers and sisters while on this Earth: by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-45). However, these acts of service were not done out of obligation or for personal glory, but because they had become innate in the lives of those living out the gospel in daily life. Our service should be borne from the desire to serve, not the obligation or requirement. In other words, joy should be a natural outcome of a life of service.

Nor is every act of service required to be grand or extensive. Lifelong servanthood calls us into repeated and frequent displays of service, no matter the size of the task, context, amount of preparation, or recognition received. Any service done in Christ’s name is significant ministry.

Biblical references:
- Matthew 25:31-45: Serving “the least of these” is serving Christ
- Matthew 4:18-22: Jesus calling the disciples
- John 17:1-19: Jesus prays for the disciples

Outcome #5: Leadership

Through service learning, youth will desire to engage in leadership of others and will use their gifts of leadership in service to others.

Rich experiences in service toward others instill in young people the desire to lead others into similar experiences. Providing youth the opportunity for leadership means they are empowered to make contributions to the world in which they live. They feel valued and viewed as resources to make this world a better place.15 Providing leadership opportunities

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within the context of service learning activities can also increase a youth’s skills in leadership, organization, public speaking, decision making, and problem solving.\textsuperscript{16}

Youth possess gifts for leadership, but they are often not invited to freely share them. Paul encourages the young Timothy to teach others what he has been entrusted with (the knowledge of grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 Timothy 2:1-2), and, though he is young, he calls Timothy to be “an example in speech and conduct” for others and to not “neglect the gift that is in you” (1 Timothy 4:12-13). Throughout the history of the Christian faith, God has called upon young people (such as Samuel, Jeremiah, and Mary of Nazareth) for unique roles of leadership. Young people have often been the catalyst for renewal and reform in the Church and world.

Adults share equally in this task of promoting leadership by inviting youth to share the gifts entrusted to them. Adults need to present leadership opportunities for youth, and provide steady measures of encouragement, nurture, and mentorship. In service learning planning, youth and adults should share decision making and leadership, using a model of working together, not adult-over-youth.

**Biblical references:**
- 1 Timothy 4:7f-16: Don’t be despised because of your youth
- 2 Timothy 2:1-7: Teach others, share in suffering, the Lord will provide understanding
- 1 Peter 4:10-11: Serve one another based on your unique gifts

**Outcome #6: Exploration of Vocation**

*Through service learning, youth will explore God’s call in their life and deepen their sense of vocation.*

Meaningful experiences in service usually lead young people to a new or renewed sense of vocation. Service experiences often lead a young person to be compassionate, which flows naturally to both a desire for community and an openness to listen for God’s unique call in their life. This calling is extended to Christians in their baptism, when the assembly prays that the newly baptized person “may proclaim the praise of God and bear (God’s) creative and redeeming Word to all the world.”\textsuperscript{17}

The word vocation itself comes from Latin, *voco* or *vocare*, which means “to be summoned” or “invited.” Vocations are extensive and unrestrained: one who teaches, pastors, administers, learns, parents, or befriends (as examples), transcending any particular career or job. These vocations come to life in the daily work of God’s people: “Many use their God-given gifts and abilities in the arenas of business, engineering, child care, science, farming, computers, education, technology, social service, health care, and hundreds of additional necessary occupations.”\textsuperscript{18} The goal of vocational exploration is to give power to all to find their unique place among the community of the faithful.

\textsuperscript{17} The Lutheran Book of Worship. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1978), 124.
God’s call is not reserved to an elitist group, but is available to all who listen and respond\textsuperscript{19} and “no one is without some commission and calling.”\textsuperscript{20} Young Christians are summoned to a vocation as they live out their faith in daily life, in service among their families, communities, Church and world. That vocation might be a natural intersection of the young person’s passions and interests and the wants of the broken world: Theologian Frederick Buechner said that “Vocation is where the world’s greatest need and a person’s greatest joy meet.”\textsuperscript{21}

An important reminder: Vocation requires discernment, an intentional process of acknowledging, exploring, and testing one’s gifts and the desire to serve.\textsuperscript{22} As opposed to a singular decision or brief moment in time, the process of determining vocation can be life-long and changing.

**Biblical references:**
- Ephesians 4:1-13: God gives a variety of gifts
- 1 Corinthians 12:1-31: The body is made of many parts
- Romans 12:3-13: All have been given gifts to share
- Psalm 139:13-18: Each person is uniquely created

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\textsuperscript{19} Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison, 85.

\textsuperscript{20} Martin Luther, “Sermon on Day of St. John the Evangelist: Everyone Should Honor His Calling and Be Content in It,” “Church Postils,” in The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther, Volume 10, John N. Lenker (ed). (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans of All Lands, 1905), 242-243.


\textsuperscript{22} Janet Cederberg, Cari Carter, and Mark Jackson, “Discerning Your Call to Youth and Family Ministry.” ELCA Youth Ministry Help Sheet Series. (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2004), 1.
THE SERVICE LEARNING PROCESS

The service learning process is an effective tool to aid youth and adults in intentional planning of service experiences. The process includes four consecutive stages:23

- **Preparation**: Anticipation of, and preparation for, a service experience.
- **Action**: Engaging in a meaningful service experience.
- **Reflection**: Process of deep reflection and learning during and following a service experience.
- **Celebration**: Recognizing the ministry that has been accomplished through the service experience.

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23 Note: The service learning model used in the *Service Learning Field Guide* was developed by the SALLT Project at Trinity Lutheran College. The terms and language used in this model are similar to other service learning models, though the terms and concepts might be applied differently. As examples, other service learning process models include: Preparation, action, reflection (Duckenfield and Swanson); planning, service, reflection, celebration (Billig); contemplation, action, reflection, commitment (Duncan and Kopperud); preparation, action, reflection, recognition (Search Institute); preparation, meaningful service, structured reflection, recognition/celebration (Kentucky Learn and Serve Project); preparation, service, reflection, celebration (South Carolina Department of Education); preparation, action, reflection, demonstration (National Association of Secondary School Principals).
PREPARATION

The anticipation of, and preparation for, a service experience.

The Preparation stage is a crucial component of the service learning process, as it provides the opportunity to determine objectives, choose a service experience, and create an action plan for carrying out the service experience. Preparation often focuses on choosing a service project and the logistics of gathering supplies, raising money, and arranging transportation; however, good preparation also involves listening to the needs of a community, determining objectives, building community, sharing expectations, and acquiring needed skills.

Types of Service Experiences

When thinking about possible service experiences, perhaps the most common type that comes to mind is direct service, which provides young people with the opportunity to engage directly with others in meeting specific needs. Your group might also consider other types of service opportunities, including providing support services (in-direct support), education, and advocacy.

These types of service experiences are explained below, with a variety of examples for each:

- **Direct Service:** These are types of service activities respond to expressed needs of individuals or communities and directed at symptoms of issues.
  - Serve a meal at a local shelter
  - Provide help with household chores for people who are ill
  - Lead worship services at a local nursing home
  - Offer a free evening of babysitting to parents of young children
  - Sponsor a refugee family
  - Build a Habitat for Humanity-sponsored house in your community
  - Start an after-school tutoring program for elementary children
  - Plan a summer day camp program for the children in your church’s neighborhood
  - Build houses for working families in Mexico
  - Shovel snow or rake leaves for persons with limited physical mobility
  - Provide a “shuttle service” for elderly members to attend church events
  - Install fresh-water wells in Namibia
  - Build a church for a Native American community

- **Support Service:** These service activities provide some level of indirect support to individuals, communities, or organizations. While participants might have limited interaction with persons affected, the lasting impact on individuals and communities can be significant.
  - Organize a walk-a-thon to support a hunger relief organization
  - Plant a community garden
  - Build a skate park for local teenagers
  - Create a recycling program for your church or neighborhood
  - Collect school supplies for low-income families
  - Plan a creative fundraiser to support a local organization
  - Pray for the world
- Plant trees
- Collect socks or gloves for the homeless
- Write letters of encouragement to missionaries
- Install new playground equipment in a neglected neighborhood park
- Restore a wetland habitat by planting new vegetation
- Organize a food drive
- Make school kits or health kits for an international relief agency
- Collect clothing for a local clothing bank
- Assist a local nonprofit with administrative tasks (mailings, distributing promotional materials, etc.)
- Clean up a littered sea shore or waterway
- Create healthy food baskets for emergency shelters
- Assist with church planting in Europe
- Perform trail maintenance in a forest
- Sponsor a child through an international relief organization
- Sort food at a food bank distribution warehouse

- **Education:** Education-related service activities include researching an issue and/or educating others about local, regional, national, or global issues.
  - Present a workshop on the AIDS epidemic in Africa
  - Hold an educational event on hunger and poverty
  - Organize a workshop on racism or cultural competency
  - Participate in an educational/immersion trip to El Salvador
  - Hold a forum to raise awareness around a specific local, regional, national, or global issue

- **Advocacy:** These types of projects involving working on behalf of others, or empowering others to have a voice, and includes proposing laws, challenging policies, and shaping public opinion around critical human-needs and environmental issues. Efforts in advocacy often are directed at root causes and attempt to address long-term, complex issues.
  - Write letters to state and/or federal legislators concerning a social issue
  - Organize a peace march or rally
  - Attend a city council meeting and speak on behalf of citizens in your community
  - Write a “letter to the editor” of a local news publication
  - Testify before a state legislative committee regarding an issue facing your community
  - Distribute flyers/posters calling for action on a current political or social issue
  - Create a website or blog that provides links to legislators and policymakers
  - Organize a meeting of community leaders and residents to address recycling, public transportation, or low-income housing
  - Organize opportunities to empower individuals or groups to do any of the above

(For additional service project or mission trip ideas, see books and organizations listed in Appendix 2 under “Ideas for Service Projects.”)
Choosing the Service Activity

The service project that you choose for your group should be done intentionally, as the motivation for the project will guide much of the service learning process. The following are suggested ways to begin thinking about an appropriate service experience.

- **Start with learning objectives.** One way to begin is to name what you want the group to learn or experience. Whether it is about the concept of grace, the growing homelessness concerns in your own community, malnutrition in African children, or to deepen awareness of another culture, start by naming your principal learning objectives. Consider: What do you want young people to feel or experience? What do you want them to learn? How do you want their attitudes or behaviors to change? Doing this exercise will direct the rest of the project planning, as all service activities should in some way link to your learning objectives.

- **Start with existing service opportunities.** Another approach is to determine which service activities your group is already doing and how you might enrich those experiences with the integration of service learning components, such as a greater focus on preparation or post-service reflection. Consider: What types of service are we already doing that can be enriched by utilizing the service learning process? Who are we already connected to? In what ways might we give our service greater meaning? This approach still requires careful planning of the key learning objectives to ensure that service activities have a distinct purpose.

- **Start with your group’s gifts and passions.** Service activities can also be determined based on your group’s interests, gifts, passions, or resources. Consider: What issues are important to our group? What gifts and passions do our young people have that can be utilized in service to others? What resources do we have to offer?

- **Start with considering your community’s issues or concerns.** Because each community is unique, the opportunities are endless – only bounded by the emerging and urgent needs expressed. Consider local service opportunities in these areas:
  - Basic human services (food, emergency services, housing issues)
  - Health and wellness (substance addiction, teen pregnancy, diseases, health care, fitness, health living, mental health)
  - Community safety (crime, traffic, school safety, disaster preparedness, domestic violence)
  - Environment (pollution, recycling, water quality, technological waste)
  - Education (literacy, second language training, sex education, local school issues)
  - Vulnerable populations (young children, older adults, immigrants, those with special needs or learning disabilities)
  - Animal welfare

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25 Adapted from Johnson, 5.
Start with considering global issues or concerns. Modern technologies allow young people to witness and respond to current global realities. Consider service opportunities for your group that have a global reach:

- Basic human services (housing, food, clothing, safe drinking water)
- Disaster response (floods, droughts, fires, earthquakes)
- Education (children’s education, sustainable farming, technology)
- Environmental issues (pollution, deforestation, garbage disposal, global warming)
- Health issues (AIDS, nutrition, immunizations, access to health care)
- International human rights issues (torture, religious freedoms, treatment of women, labor policies, human trafficking)
- Global support for struggling nations (financial support, debt reduction)
- War and military conflict

Start with challenging social barriers. Service learning provides the opportunity to confront and challenge social barriers, such as those associated with race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, or political ideologies. Consider the barriers confronting your young people, church, community, or the global community and design a service experience that challenges attitudes and behaviors that divide, rather than unite, God’s people.

Preparation Activities to Ensure a Positive Service Experience

After determining an appropriate service project comes the task of preparing the group for the experience and coordinating the resources necessary to see the project through to completion. The following items are suggested activities for the Preparation stage to ensure a positive service experience.

Determine Readiness

- Not every service opportunity is appropriate for every group. Just because “the church youth group down the road did this” or you’ve received a flyer for what sounds like a great international mission trip doesn’t mean the activity is right for your group.

- Consider your group’s previous involvement in service experiences and resources (human, financial, time) available to complete a service project.

- Pay attention to your instincts. Your gut reactions might determine if the service opportunity is a good match for your group.

Determine Goals and Learning Objectives

- As previously mentioned, the concept of service learning is distinct from community service and volunteerism because it utilizes clearly stated learning outcomes. Consider the following questions when designing your group’s learning outcomes:
  - What do we hope to accomplish with this service experience?
  - In what areas do you hope to see growth among participants? Which attitudes and behaviors do we wish to challenge? What skills do we hope to develop?
- How can participants’ Christian faith be challenged or strengthened by this service experience?
- How might this service experience integrate with other youth ministry activities?
- What is this service experience intending to accomplish? What impact do we anticipate on the individuals or communities we serve?

- To assist in creating holistic learning goals, consider developing your intended outcomes in each of three areas:
  - Affective (the heart): Name what you intend participants will feel as a result of the service experience.
  - Behavioral (the hands): Name what you intend participants will do as a result of the service experience.
  - Cognitive (the head): Name what you intend participants will know as a result of the service experience.

Make an Action Plan for Logistics

- Prepare all logistical needs for the project (travel, supplies, fundraising, etc.). Involve as many in the group as you can in attending to these needs – it can increase the support of the project from among the group.

- Provide necessary information to participants: Share what the project will look like (where it is, who will be served, the group’s role in service, etc.). When and where will the group meet? What are the travel arrangements? What should participants bring along? Discuss what type of preparation or training will be required or provided.

- Screen adult volunteers as required by the service site or your church.

- Collect medical release forms, permission slips, and other documents your group requires for the service activity.

- If appropriate, an initial visit to the site by the group leaders (or the entire group) might be helpful.

- International travel adds another set of challenges: Be sure you have made arrangements for appropriate government paperwork, travel documents, insurance, and vaccinations.
Discuss Individual and Group Expectations

- Find out what participants hope to gain from the project. (This is a helpful conversation when youth return to their original expectations in the Reflection stage.) Ask them to complete the sentence, “Today I hope to …” or “I am most looking forward to …”

- Develop a covenant for individual and group expectations. This is a positive group-building activity that also places ownership of the project with the whole group. It can also include “non-negotiable” policies from leaders (such as bedtimes, traveling in pairs, use of electronic devices, etc.). To have the group develop a shared covenant, begin by asking “To ensure a safe and positive experience for each member of our group, what items might we agree on? To what will we commit ourselves?”

Spend Time in Community Building

- Design community building activities for the group so they can begin to know one another before the service project. Include such elements in every pre-experience gathering.

- Utilize a spiritual gifts inventory and conversation about the use of gifts to determine what each person has to offer to the whole.

- Tell stories or share about previous or similar service experiences.

- Leaders should be trained in understanding group dynamics and how to lead small group conversations.

Address Relevant Issues

- Conduct a Bible study on service and the call of Christians to serve others. (See Appendix 1 for a list of possible biblical passages.)

- Provide information about the population or place where you will serve. Discuss relevant issues related to the place of service (why and how physically disabled children learn differently, how reading to elderly persons increases memory retention, why new trees need to be planted in the park, etc.). Share photographs, articles, or video clips that relate to the service experience.

- Discuss stereotypes, impressions, assumptions and concerns about the people or places where you will serve. Discuss cultural issues that might become apparent in the place of service.

  Tip: Act out role plays that demonstrate possible situations that may arise during the service project.

Talk about the relationship between power and service. Develop a sense of mutuality of those serving and those being served (versus a distinction between “those who give” and “those who receive” that places the persons being served in an inferior position).

Coordinate with the Individual/Group/Organization

- Ask good questions of the service site, which can help you provide information to the group as to what to expect. Suggested questions include:
  - With whom will we working? What might we need to know or learn about the individuals we will be working among?
  - What is the organization’s mission? What is the history/background of the organization?
  - What services does the organization provide to the community? What needs to these services seek to address?
  - What are the major obstacles or challenges faced by the organization?
  - What opportunities are available for our group through this organization?
  - What needs in the community is this organization aware of that we might be able to assist with?
  - What special issues might we need to be aware of as we serve at this site?

- Make sure the individual or service site knows of your expectations and limitations. Give them a “heads up” concerning what you are hoping to accomplish with your group. Often organizations can often tailor or redirect service experiences in a way that serves your intentions or considers your group’s limitations, while still meeting the organization’s needs.

Address Safety and Liability Issues

- Review health and safety issues that might arise at the service site. Take all reasonable precautions. Make sure you’ve addressed as many safety, health, and liability concerns that you are aware of. Determine a plan for emergency procedures in the event of an accident and provide this information to all participants.

- Require your participants to provide a medical history and release form. Read each one carefully to understand your participant’s health history and current medical issues, including prescription medications, dietary needs, etc. It is recommended that originals be retained by the group leader during travel and onsite work (although limited access should be guaranteed to ensure privacy).

- Pay attention to your church and/or denomination’s policies for youth-to-adult ratios, as well as other child protection policies, including those established by a service site.

- Determine to what extent your congregation’s insurance provides liability coverage for youth and adults participating.

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- For international trips, research travel advisories issued by the U.S. Department of State to understand current safety issues. It might be helpful to identify the closest United States Embassy or consulate office in the event of emergency evacuation, loss of travel documents, etc.

Communicate Expectations for Adult Leaders

- Provide your adult leaders with a list of expectations you have for their involvement in leading or supporting your service activity. Don’t assume they know what you expect just because they are adults or because they’ve been involved before.

Example: Adult Expectations for Mission Trip

- **The basics**: Love God! Love kids!
- **Be a trip leader**: Attend and participate in all planning meetings. Have fun at them, too! Do your part in shared leadership and follow through on your commitments.
- **Be a role model**: Be aware of your attitude, action, and languages and how they can be interpreted by youth.
- **Be a parent**: Enforce and maintain established rules set by the group or group leaders. Don’t be afraid to discipline as appropriate.
- **Be a youth minister**: Care for the youth, listen to them, and ask them about their life. Encourage, laugh, inspire. Love the obnoxious kid. Take time for yourself, too. Get a good night’s sleep and plenty of rest. Be conscious of your own mental and physical health – and ask if you need help in any way.
- **Be a Christian**: Remember why we are doing what we’re doing … View yourself a missionary of Jesus Christ!

Bless and Send the Group

- Before the group embarks on the service project, hold a commissioning service to bless the work of the group and for their learning. This is a good opportunity to involve the whole congregation (parents, mentors, the church family, pastors, etc.) in the project.

- Invite a group of individuals to pray for your group while you are serving. For an extended service trip, invite prayer partners to “Pray 2@2” – a commitment to pray for two minutes at 2:00 p.m. each day of your trip.

Challenges of the Preparation Stage

**Don’t rush the first step.** Preparation is often a part of the service learning process that gets left behind. Don’t underestimate the need to prepare yourself and your group for the experience. Adequate preparation is necessary for creating a worthwhile and rewarding event.
We think we know what is needed. There is danger in thinking that we know what is best. In planning for service experiences, don’t assume solutions or answers to questions or issues presented. Instead, involve the community in setting the service agenda.

Don’t tell participants how they’re going to feel. While the participants in the group may be in for an experience of their lives, be careful not to force your expectations of transformation on them. Because individuals respond differently to situations, simply introduce what is to be done, but don’t tell them how to think or feel about it. Let them experience it for themselves.

Think “process,” not “event.” While your service learning activities do involve events, remember to think about the process. Youth may not change suddenly overnight after a solitary experience. Instead, keep in mind that the process of life transformation and growth in faith occurs over time … and these service experiences are milestones on the journey!

Be realistic. It is critically important to determine the size and scope of the potential service project. The scale should be realistic for your group to accomplish. If the group’s leadership is new to planning service projects, start small.

Don’t “over prepare.” While there are many details to attend to in designing service experiences, resist the temptation to have everything planned in such a way that flexibility is not welcomed. Allow the Holy Spirit, the talents of group members, and unforeseen circumstances room to enter the process.

Suggested Resources

“Service Learning: Adding Flavor to Life.” A DVD with three videos (two for adults, one for youth) to introduce the service learning process outlined in this Service Learning Field Guide, produced by the SALLT Project at Trinity Lutheran College and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For more information, visit www.sallt.org.

Find Your Fit: Dare to Act on God’s Design for You (LifeKeys for Teens), by Jane Kise and Kevin Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 1998). Comprehensive self-discovery resources designed for teenagers, including activities to determine God-given gifts, passions, values, etc.


Know What You Are Capable of Doing

In order to be useful to all parties involved, some service activities require longer participation and/or a greater time commitment than others. The length of the experience and the amount of time required are determined by the service tasks involved and should be negotiated by all the parties. Sometimes a program can do more harm than good if a project is abandoned after too short a time or given too little attention.

**Faithful Travel.** A five-program DVD series to explore “faithful travel” and raise provocative questions for those considering domestic or global education trips. Hosted by popular travel author Rick Steves, the DVD can be purchased or viewed online. Discussion guide included. Available at [http://archive.elca.org/mosaic/faithfultravel](http://archive.elca.org/mosaic/faithfultravel).

**Companion Synods Handbook.** Designed for groups visiting global church partners, Part 4 (Planning Trips) provides useful information, tools, and ideas for any group participating in global travel – especially logistical arrangements. Also available in Spanish. Order from [globalmissioninfo@elca.org](mailto:globalmissioninfo@elca.org) or 1-800-638-3522.


**Welcome Forward: A Field Guide for Global Travelers** (with music CD). A resource to help prepare groups of any age for thoughtful, respectful, life changing, community-centered mission trips and travel. Available from [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org) or 1-800-328-4648. Order one copy free of charge from [globalmissioninfo@elca.org](mailto:globalmissioninfo@elca.org).

“**Questions to Ask for Planning a Mission Trip**” and “**Mission Trip Planning Chart.**” Simple, ready-to-use sheets with questions to consider when planning domestic mission trips (including purpose, logistics, training, etc.), as well as a timeline planning chart. Produced by the Presbyterian Church USA. Available at [www.pcusa.org/missiontrips/tools.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/missiontrips/tools.htm).


**A Trip Leader's Planning Manual.** Volume 1 in the three-volume series “**When God’s People Travel Together.**” A comprehensive guide to planning youth mission trips and service projects. Produced by the Presbyterian Church USA. Order from [www.pcusa.org/marketplace](http://www.pcusa.org/marketplace) or 1-800-524-2612.

**Bible Studies for Mission.** Volume 3 in the three-volume series “**When God’s People Travel Together.**” A Bible study resource to introduce youth to the biblical call to mission and service. Produced by the Presbyterian Church USA. Order from [www.pcusa.org/marketplace](http://www.pcusa.org/marketplace) or 1-800-524-2612.

“**Short Term Mission Questions: Are You Asking Questions about Your Short-Term Mission Trips?**” A list of questions to provide a comprehensive discussion about your group’s intentions and preparation for short term mission experiences. Produced by the Outreach Foundation of the Presbyterian Church. Available at [www.pcusa.org/get/resources/resource/1370](http://www.pcusa.org/get/resources/resource/1370).
“Doing Service in Groups.” First three pages provide helpful guidance for choosing an appropriate service project. Produced by the University of Maryland Community Service-Learning. Available at www.csl.umd.edu/Handouts/general/doingserviceingroups.pdf.

“Why Mission Trips Are a Waste of Time (And How to Make Sure Yours Isn’t).” Written by Noel Becchetti of the Center for Student Missions, this essay can jumpstart a good discussion among your youth as to the purpose of their service experience. Available at www.rca.org/Page.aspx?&pid=1579.

Glue Boys. A documentary designed to create awareness about what is happening to thousands of impoverished children around the world and to inspire youth to action. A resource kit of the DVD, leader’s guide, and promotional materials are available. Order from www.glueboys.com/themovie/store.htm.
ACTIONS

Engaging in a meaningful service experience.

Opportunities for Meaningful Service Are Endless

The Action stage includes any activity (large or small!) that allows young people to engage in unselfish service to, with, or on behalf of others. Challenge yourself to think outside the box in creating service activities! (See “Types of Service Experiences” and “Choosing the Service Activity” under the Preparation section above for guidance in choosing an appropriate service experience.) Most attention in the service learning process is typically placed on the Action stage – and rightfully so, as the rest of the process hinges on the actual service experience. Youth certainly learn most by what they do and experience, therefore service experiences must be engaging, purposeful, and meaningful.

The reality of the Action stage is that it will be different for every group and every experience of service that ever happens. For the span of time of your service activity, whether one hour long or across five years, the Holy Spirit has called together a unique group to serve in Christ’s name in that particular place, with those particular individuals or communities, for that particular period of time.

Suggestions to Ensure a Positive Service Experience

The following list provides guidance to various areas of attention during the Action stage. Consider the components relevant to your specific situation.

- **Pray.** Continue to immerse your service experience in thoughtful prayer. Pray for the work that is being done, the people being served, for safety, and for the opportunities to grow, learn from, and share with others.

- **Orientation.** The group should receive an orientation to the community or service site where they will conduct their service project. This orientation can include an introduction to the community; learning the organization’s purpose, philosophy and history; and understanding how your group’s role is significant.

  - **Tip:** If possible, have the group hear from a person who will be affected by the group’s work. Or, have someone share a personal story of someone likely impacted.

- **Review expectations.** Make clear the expectations you have for individuals and the group. It may be helpful to briefly review your group covenant (if one was created earlier) as you gather. If working with an organization, make sure you understand their expectations for volunteers – and that information is communicated to the group.

  - **Tip:** To maintain focus on the service experience, prohibit youth from using electronic devices during your time together.

- **Continue community building.** Create opportunities for community building during the experience to allow participants to continue to get to know each other, learn from each other,
discover others’ gifts and passions, etc. This is an especially important consideration for groups on an extended mission trip.

- **Review safety concerns.** Ensure that safety issues specific to the site or project are reviewed with your group. Make sure participants have necessary safety equipment and are trained to use it properly. Have copies of medical release forms immediately available. If necessary, have a first-aid kit available and know the location of a telephone you can use. Always plan for an emergency; they often happen in the least expected times!

- **Involve each person.** Make sure that each participant has something significant to do and has the opportunity to contribute to the project.

- **Pay attention to learning goals.** Leaders should reinforce learning goals by drawing connections as the opportunities arise. Obviously, the group must also be open to other, unplanned learning opportunities as they arise.

- **Remain flexible and practice grace.** Be flexible in responding to unforeseen circumstances. Despite careful planning, service projects may not turn out as you had originally planned or hoped. Leaders must exercise patience, graciousness, and gratitude in the midst of chaos, changing priorities, etc. (This is an especially important model as your group serves in Christ’s name!) Remain open to the new opportunities that present themselves.

- **Maintain a joyful attitude.** Youth will often take their cue from leaders. Even if the experience is unpleasant, resorting to complaining generally isn’t helpful to anyone.

**The Role of Those Being Served**

**Include the Community in Setting the Agenda.** Most service learning writers and practitioners agree that individuals or community members being served should have a voice in determining what service will actually be done. In other words, the agenda for service is set by the people being served, not by those doing the serving. This establishes a sense of ownership from within that community and reduces the possibility that those doing the service think they know what’s best to do. Without this information, service can be done as a false understanding of the true needs of a particular person or community.

Brazilian educator Paulo Friere called this sense of charity-based community service “false generosity” which can lead to reinforcing stereotypes, enabling oppressive systems to continue, and blaming “those less fortunate” for needing services provided to them.

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29 Ibid.
To make this happen, find a way listen to an individual or members of a community as part of the Preparation stage, encouraging them to share their concerns and visions for their community. When such an arrangement is not possible, make sure that “program planners have taken seriously the perspectives and priorities of community residents.”

Understand Ministry as With Others, Not For Others. Carl Dudley writes, “When we do ministry for people, we reduce them to objects. ‘They’ and ‘we’ are different ... With our resources we are powerful, and with their needs they are weak.” Use language that reflects mutuality and reciprocity in the service relationship, such as “ministering with people” and how, at the same time, they minister in return.

Challenge your group to find ways of including those being served in the service learning process. The concept is difficult for some to grasp, as service is often seen as ministry for another person or place. In this situation, a hierarchical relationship is immediately established in which there is one who gives and one who receives. Service learning provides the opportunity to challenge this notion and create a sense of community that includes your group and those you serve with and among – a “reciprocal relationship between the student and the community whereby both learn from and serve each other.”

Don’t Ignore the People You Work Among. During your service project, don’t ignore the people you serve. There is a tendency to focus on our “work” rather than our “ministry,” which includes relating to the people around you. Youth (and adults) can be shy, intimidated or uncomfortable around people that aren’t much like themselves. There can be awkwardness to being with people who have a different language, different life story, or different values than our own. Prepare youth for how to approach these situations (role plays work well) and encourage them to remove these barriers from the serving relationship. In your service project, include opportunities (as appropriate) for talking, sharing, eating, or playing together.

Monitor the Community’s Expectations. During and after the service project, get feedback from the people being served to determine if expectations are being met and what might be improved or changed. This may seem that project organizers are ceding control over what is being done – which is exactly the point!

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32 Benson, 80.
33 Ibid.
Reflection Activities During the Service Experience

It is wise to begin some of your reflection activities during the actual service event. This could include journal reflections or conversations during breaks or as the group continues its work. Leaders should always be thinking of ways to use the present moment as an opportunity for learning.

Some questions for observation and analysis that can begin during the Action stage include:

- How do you feel about the work/tasks you are doing?
- What role are you playing? Is it the best fit for you?
- What skills are you using? What gifts are you able to use?
- What are you learning about the people with whom you are working (or the environment, etc.)?
- How are our actions affecting others?
- Where do you see God at work? How is God present in this service experience?
- What changes would facilitate or improve our service experience?

Challenges of the Action Stage

Inadequate preparation. Some frustrations in the Action stage can be a result of poor or inadequate attention during the Preparation stage. For example, the group was prepared to do something vastly different than what the service site anticipated due to lack of communication. Or, an insensitive comment (such as “These people smell funny”) is made by a participant who wasn’t invited to learn the realities of homelessness and personal hygiene prior to the service experience.

Underestimating the value of service. A criticism of service learning is that too great a focus can be placed on reflection and learning that the actual act of serve can seem insignificant. Remember that Christ calls us to serve in his name – the incredible opportunities we have to be the “hands and feet of Christ” are what we are all about. Don’t forget your primary mission is to serve.

Little things are, in fact, big things. During service events there might be a “little moment” that can be transformative for a young person; it often occurs when he or she feels integrally connected to someone he or she is serving with. Take note of these seemingly insignificant events and process them later … They can become the moments that are engraved on their memory for years to come.

Determining impact only by what is measurable. Leaders must caution themselves against evaluating the validity or effectiveness of a service experience based solely on what is visible and measurable (who showed up, how many hours were invested, how many people were served, etc.) and neglecting less quantifiable, yet deeply meaningful, activities (listening, observing, playing, learning, growing, etc.).

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REFLECTION

Process of deep reflection and learning during and following a service experience.

While intentional reflection should happen to some degree at each stage of the service learning process, it is a critical element to follow the Action stage. In fact, active reflection on experiences has been called the “operational linchpin” of the service learning process and usually distinguishes service learning from community service and volunteerism (see page 7). In critical reflection, individuals create meaning and gain new knowledge from their experiences – often in “Ah-ha!” moments as they share, analyze, and evaluate experiences, reinforce or form new opinions, or consider changes in behavior.

The Reflection stage can be conducted in a number of ways. The most common method is probably asking questions in small or large group conversations. A second common method is individual journal writing. Both of these activities can be made rich by using intentional, appropriate, carefully-crafted questions. At the same time, other creative reflection methods (explored later) should also be considered in order to meet a variety of learning styles.


The human mind tends to move somewhat naturally through a progression of interpreting and applying meaning that is drawn from our experience. This to say that most people engage in some level of reflection simply based on the fact that human brains are wired to process experiences – whether learning to speak, hold a conversation, ride a bicycle, use a computer, work through interpersonal conflicts, or any other aspect of how humans live and function.

Reflective thinking is a key component of the service learning process and, therefore, requires careful attention and planning. A simple framework for processing group experiences is the “What? So What? Now What?” approach. Examples of possible questions at each of the three steps are provided below, though questions should be carefully chosen for your group’s experience or particular context.

- **What?** These questions are designed to gather facts and observations about the service experience. They should invite participants to describe, without judgment, their observations and experiences using concrete examples. (Remember: At this level the goal is not to fully process or draw meaning from the experience.)
  - What happened today?
  - What did you do today? What was your role? What did you contribute?
  - To what extent did you participate?

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37 The best description of this process is probably the Experiential Learning Cycle described by educational theorist David Kolb. See David Kolb, *Experiential learning*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984.)
38 This model, widely used by service learning practitioners and writers, is based on Kate McPherson, *Enriching Learning Through Serving*. (Mount Vernon, WA: Project Service Leadership, 1989) and is utilized here with the author’s permission.
- What was accomplished?
- Were you comfortable or uncomfortable today?
- Did anything frustrate you?
- What was the best/worst/most challenging thing that happened?
- Describe the people you met today. What were your interactions like?
- How did people respond to you?
- Who in the group surprised you?
- Where did you see God at work?
- How does this experience compare to others you’ve had?
- What happened as a result of your work? Who or what will see a benefit?
- What other observations did you make?

So What? These questions invite participants to process their experiences on a deeper level, providing opportunities to analyze and interpret thoughts and feelings. Because this stage can address both emotional (feeling) and cognitive (thinking) responses, the suggested questions are separated into two categories.

Questions designed to analyze and interpret feelings:
- What was this experience like for you?
- What feelings or emotions (if any) did you experience?
- Which emotions or feelings surprised you?
- How did it feel to serve? What impact did it have on you?
- What did you appreciate (about another person, the site, your experience, etc.)?
- How did the actual service experience compare to your expectations?
- What is new in your relationship with God?
- Do you feel like you contributed to something good?
- Did you feel like a part of the community you were working in?

Questions designed to analyze and interpret thoughts:
- What was going through your mind today?
- What did the experience make you think about?
- How did it change your thinking about [choose a topic or issue]?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- What worked? What didn’t work?
- How is this experience related to other areas of your life?
- Who determines what is best (for people, for the community, for the Earth, etc.)?
- What thoughts (if any) does this experience give you about issues in your local community? The nation? The world?
- How any of your assumptions or stereotypes (about people, a community, the world, etc.) been challenged by the experience?
- What did you learn about yourself from this experience?

Tip: Be sure to consider questions in both areas, as some people are “feelers” while others are “thinkers.”
• How was your experience different than what you anticipated?
• How were you different when you left (as compared to when you began)?
• What public policy issues are involved? What are their implications? How can they be improved?
• Who determines what’s best for a community?
• In what ways has your understanding of service/servanthood changed?
• In what ways did this experience challenge your values?
• What new opinions have you formed?
• How might your efforts contribute to or hinder social change?
• Is service always helpful or effective?

Now What? These final questions invite participants to consider the implications of the service experience and to determine the “next steps” or a course of action based on their experience and subsequent reflection. Challenge participants to consider how to incorporate their experience into some type of action, such as a change in attitudes, behaviors, or future experiences.40

• Where do we go from here? What’s the next step?
• What could this group do to address the problems we saw at the service site?
• What would you do, or will you do, differently next time?
• How will this experience affect your future?
• What are you interested in learning more about?
• In what ways can you share your experience and your learning with others?
• Given your experience, what changes might you make in your life?
• What is God leading you to do with this experience?
• How might God be calling you to use your gifts in light of this experience?
• How does this experience challenge you to live as a Christian in the world?
• Why is it important for you to be involved in service?

Tips for Leading Effective Group Conversations

Conversations that invite reflect thinking require a safe, comfortable, and hospitable environment that facilitates reflection, growth, and learning. The following components are important considerations in creating a conducive environment.41

• Train facilitators. Whenever possible, small group conversation leaders should be trained in basic group dynamics and conversation leadership skills. (A gentle reminder: Adults need this training, too.)

40 The last stage in Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle is “active experimentation.” At this point, participants may not be able to articulate a completely new course of action or change in behavior. Instead, young people might “experiment” with their new learning by integrating it with previous experiences, knowledge, beliefs, etc. and, over time, begin to make changes or adjustments. In summary: Don’t expect or assume that a young person will necessarily make immediate or radical changes.

Sit in a circle. Circles provide the chance for everyone to see each other and don’t automatically provide a “front” or focal point. Be on the same level, too (either all sitting in chairs or on the ground).

Avoid closed questions. Closed questions are those that require a simple answer, such as “Did you have a role today?” or “Were you challenged?” (both questions could be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”). Instead, use open-ended questions, such as “Which roles did you have today? In what ways were your gifts used?” or “To what extent were you challenged by this experience?” Open-ended questions invite a continued conversation.

Appreciate every answer. Because young people need a safe place in order to share, each response should be treated carefully and leaders should strive to build a place of trust. Resist the temptation to analyze every response. Allow participants the freedom to share their thoughts and feelings without the threat of being told their wrong.

Honor the right to pass. Notice the quieter participants and encourage their response – though understand that some youth are simply not comfortable sharing certain things at certain times. In these situations, always allow the opportunity to gracefully pass.

Don’t be afraid of silence. If a question doesn’t yield an immediate response, don’t feel you have to jump in and answer it yourself. Let the question linger in the air for a while. In fact, inviting a time of thoughtful reflection can actually provide deeper insights.

Leave questions unanswered. Not every question has an answer. As young people raise questions and issues, resist the urge to provide a solid answer. The Christian faith is full of questions and part of the journey is wrestling for insight – not seeking pat answers.

Turn questions back to the group. Keep conversation alive by turning tough questions back to the whole group. For instance, say, “That’s a great question! What do you all think about that?”

Ensure confidentiality. The adage “What happens in the group stays in the group” is an important assurance to young people who are invited to share thoughts and feelings.

Know your group. Be aware of what’s going on with the youth in your group. Be careful not to offend, embarrass, humiliate, or threaten a young person by what you say.

Creative Reflection Methods

While group conversation and written reflections are effective for reflective thinking, they can also be limiting to some young people. Consider a variety of options for reflection, including creative methods that engage both sides of the brain and use a variety of creative gifts among
participants. Because our society often highly values a person’s ability to speak and write, inviting creative means of expression might be unfamiliar or uncomfortable to some participants, though it will certainly be welcomed and appreciated by others.

Examples of creative expression activities for the Reflection stage include:

- write a poem
- compose music or write a song
- paint a picture, draw, or doodle
- capture and share photographs
- produce a video
- create a collage
- paint a mural
- create a sculpture
- read a story, poem, or other writing pertinent to issues raised
- create a dramatic presentation (such as monologue, skit, or pantomime)
- design a brochure, information sheet, or flyer
- write an article or essay
- utilize a blog, inviting each person to contribute reflections
- use popular music with themes relative to the experience
- use lectio divina or other reflective prayer practices
- create a scrapbook of memories associated with the service experience
- create a handbook, guide, or other resource for future participants
- create a website to share photos and stories
- write a story from another person’s perspective (such as a person encountered during the service experience)
- create a photo slideshow
- choreograph a dance
- write a “Letter to the Editor” of a local news publication
- stage a debate to discuss two opposing views
- create role-play situations to demonstrate issues raised
- create a question-and-answer panel, with participants serving as panel members
- create an artistic piece from items collected at the service site

**Tip**: To ensure you are meeting multiple learning styles, utilize at least 2-3 different reflection techniques.

**Challenges of the Reflection Stage**

**Easy to delay or put off.** The Reflection stage can be neglected if it is delayed much after the service event. The best learning moments come in the time during and immediately following the service experience, but for a variety of reasons (time constraints, distractions, etc.) it is put off or even forgotten. Leaders should make sure adequate reflection opportunities are written into the action plan.

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42 Understanding a variety of preferred learning styles invites a greater use of creative activities that young people can connect to. To learn more about individual learning styles, search the Internet for Neil Fleming and Charles Bonwell’s Visual-Aural-Read-Kinesthetic (VARK) Learning Styles, Richard Felder’s Index of Learning Styles, or Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences.
The wrong questions are posed. Asking questions does not constitute the Reflection stage. Asking good questions does. Posing general questions such as, “Did you have a good time?” or “How was it?” invite responses, but do not allow youth to have meaningful reflection.

Getting stuck with one or two methods. The creative tools for individual and group reflection are numerous! Don’t become locked into a small handful of methods that are repeatedly used project after project. These approaches often reflect the leader’s preferred learning style or preferred teaching method, therefore the challenge is to try new means of leading reflection.

Forcing feelings of the leader or a group member onto others. Each participant will experience and draw different opinions, conclusions, or questions from a service experience. Don’t assume that all participants experienced the same feelings as the leader or an especially-vocal group member. One group member may have had a life-changing experience while another was downright bored and unengaged. Leaders should share their own experiences, but invite others to share their own as well – allowing and affirming diversity of feelings.

Suggested Resources


Deep Justice Journeys Student Journal: Moving from Mission Trips to Missional Living, by Kara E. Powell and Brad M. Griffin (Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2009). A well-crafted, comprehensive reader and journal for service experiences. Reflection questions challenge participants to consider social justice issues that rise from service and mission experiences. (Serves as an excellent companion to the Deep Justice Journeys Leader’s Guide above.)


CELEBRATION

Recognizing the ministry that has been accomplished through the service experience.

After the Action and Reflection stages are complete, it is time to celebrate! Celebration ties in the previous three stages and offers an opportunity for young people to honor the work accomplished, continue to tell the stories of their experiences, and consider additional or a future engagement. In effect, it can be a continuation of the Reflection stage, as preparing for celebratory events also requires adequate reflection to determine what and how best it is to share with others. Celebration also is a time for worship, to recognize and rejoice in the ways God has called us to serve, guided the serving, and challenges us to a lifetime of meaning service to and with others.

Ideas for Celebration Activities

- **Pray.** Engage the group in corporate prayer, asking God’s blessing on the service completed. Encourage youth to engage in individual prayer as well, to continue to seek how God is directing them to use this service learning experience in their lives.

- **Worship.** Hold a worship service with the group who participated in the service project, either at the end of your time together or at a point in the near future. Allow time during worship to share stories and to thank God for the opportunity to serve. Remember to pray for the service site, community, and/or the people you served.

- **Involve service partners.** Consider how recipients or partners at service sites can be appropriately involved in planning celebration activities.

- **Study God’s Word.** Conduct a Bible study on service, vocation, compassion, or a topic directly related to your service project. Scripture stories often “come alive” when they are read and discussed through a new perspective or the lens of a recent experience. Or, revisit a Bible study used during the Preparation stage and compare present responses, thoughts, and feelings to those they had before.

- **Offer a training session.** Plan a training session for members of your church or community that highlights issues or concerns raised during the service experience. Use the experience as an opportunity to raise public awareness about important social, political, economic, and faith issues.

- **“Tell the story.”** Seek opportunities to continue to share about the experience, including sharing through church publications, school publications, local newspapers, websites, blogs, etc. As participants are comfortable, invite them to share the fruits of their creative reflection activities from the Reflection stage.

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**Tip:** As your group returns from an extended mission trip, have a group waiting to receive them. This allows them to immediately share their experiences with someone willing to listen.
Plan a worship service for the congregation. The group can prepare and lead a worship service for the entire congregation. Not only does it involve the whole church family in your service project, it honors and blesses the ministry of the church’s youth. Elements of worship (scripture readings, the message, prayers, etc.) center on the group’s experiences and learning, thereby extending the Reflection stage as they plan the worship service.

Recognize contributions. Provide for recognition of individuals who were involved in planning and leading the service project, especially volunteers. Provide a way to recognize all persons involved in the service project and how their gifts were used for the good of the whole, such as handing out certificates, t-shirts, or small gifts. Celebrate the numerous gifts that God has given God’s people!

Thank supporters. Have participants write thank-you notes to key supporters of the service project, including church leaders, financial donors, pray-ers, or those working “behind the scenes” in planning. This provides a way to connect them to your service project, even if they did not directly participate.

Thank the service site. Don’t forget to extend thanks and gratitude to the individual(s), host agency, or community that received you. Be sure to express your appreciation for what the group learned from the service site – not just for what the group could give.

Consider long-term involvement. Possibilities for a longer-term involvement including revisiting the service site in the future, or assisting with another project or emerging need. Local service projects may set fire to a young person’s passion to continue his or her involvement, by themselves or with a friend, after your group’s service project. Or, as a group, plan another future activity that capitalizes on the passions and gifts of group members that also fulfill expressed needs of an individual or community.

Continue celebrating into the future. If the service project was especially memorable to those involved (such as a lengthy mission trip or international immersion experience, consider holding another celebration months or years later. Discuss how the experience continues to influence them.

Evaluation of the Service Experience

An important component of the Celebration stage is to evaluate your service experience with your group and your leaders. This evaluation is different than the Reflection stage; it is focused on the outcomes, expectations, planning and implementation of the service learning process.

Suggested evaluation questions for leaders to consider include:

- Did we identify a worthwhile need to address? Were the learning objectives appropriate?
- Were our learning objectives met? To what extent?
- Did we involve youth in the right way?

Questions are compiled from a number of sources, including Benson, 102, and “P.A.R.E.,” 6.
• How adequately did we prepare youth and adults for this experience?
• To what extent was our project successful for the people served? For the organization or service site?
• How successful was the project for each participant?
• How successful was the project for our group as a whole?
• Did we provide a meaningful experience to young people? What are the short-term outcomes of this project? What might be the long-term outcomes?
• What could we do differently, if we were to do it again?
• What follow-up needs to happen?

If leaders desire input from group members, suggested evaluation questions that can be asked of participants include:44
• What needs did your/our service fulfill?
• What needs did your/our service not address?
• To what extent did this experience meet your expectations?
• What might have contributed to a more positive experience?

Challenges of the Celebration Stage

Easy to delay or put off. Much like the Reflection stage, the Celebration stage can be put off or forgotten after the service experience. The best way to ensure celebration happens in your service learning process is to create a plan before your service project. That way, participants already anticipate there’s more to the project than just doing it. It can also give them something to look forward to.

“Look what we did!” Celebration can happen in such a way that the group appears boastful or proud of what has been accomplished. Resist language that suggests, “Look what we did. We are good Christians,” instead focusing on how people’s gifts were used, what impact the service has done, and how young people have been transformed by the experience.

Suggested Resources


It’s Easy Being Green: One Student’s Guide to Serving God and Saving the Planet, by Emma Sleeth (Zondervan, 2008). For young people interested in making lifestyle adjustments related to improving the environment, this book provides insight and a wealth of ideas for making such changes.

44 Adapted from “P.A.R.E.,” 7.
APPENDIX 1: THE BIBLICAL CALL TO SERVICE

The following verses and passages are examples of the biblical invitation to serve others. They can be adapted for use in pre-service reflection, for Bible studies, for group reflection or journaling, or for worship services.

SERVICE AND JUSTICE

Acts 1:8 – Jesus send his disciples to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Matthew 22:37-39 – We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind … and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Matthew 5:6-7, 9 – The Beatitudes, in which Jesus blesses those who are hunger, thirst for righteousness, are merciful, and are peacemakers.

1 Peter 4:8-11 – We are to be good stewards of God’s grace, serving each other with our God-given gifts.

Micah 6:8 – “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Amos 5:23-34 – Let justice roll down like waters.

Philippians 2:3-5 – Look not to your own interests, but to those of others.

Matthew 5:13-16 – We are the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.”

Mark 10:35-45 – The greatest among us must be a servant.


John 12:26 – Whoever serves Jesus must follow him.

Ephesians 2:8-10 – We are saved by grace, through faith.

James 2:14-18 – Faith without works is dead.

1 Thessalonians 2:5-8 – We are determined to share the Gospel and our whole lives with others.

Acts 2:42-47 – The work of the Church includes helping those in need.

Galatians 6:1-10 – We are to work for the good of all – especially for those of the family of faith.

GIFTS AND CALL

Matthew 28:17-20 – Jesus gives the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations.

1 Corinthians 12:1-31 – All have gifts, and the body is made of many parts.

Ephesians 4:1-13 – God gives a variety of gifts.

Romans 12:3-13 – All have been given gifts to share.

Jeremiah 1:4-10 – God calls Jeremiah as a prophet.
Genesis 6:5-18, 22 – God appoints Noah and his family to build an ark.

Genesis 21:1-8, 22:1-18 – God calls Abraham and Sarah to lead a nation and promises them a son.


1 Samuel 16:1-12 – Samuel anoints David as the future king of Israel.

Luke 1:26-56 – The angel Gabriel visits Mary to announce she will bear a son who will save the world.

Mark 1:14-20, 2:13-14 – Jesus calls disciples to join him in his earthly ministry.

APPENDIX 2: RESOURCES AND LINKS

Helpful resources and links are provided at the end of each section of the service learning process (Preparation, Action, Reflection, Celebration). The list below contains suggested resources not previously mentioned.

SERVICE LEARNING BOOKS, GUIDES, CURRICULA


Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn, by Peter L. Benson and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Abingdon Press, 1993). Though dated, this book is an excellent resource to introduce service learning to a congregational youth ministry and includes numerous handouts and planning charts.


Sojourning: A Leader’s Guide for Short-Term Mission Travel. For trip organizers and leaders facilitating successful mission travel experiences. Produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Order from globalmissioninfo@elca.org or 1-800-638-3522.


Crazy Enough to Care: Changing Your World through Compassion, Justice, and Racial Reconciliation, by Alvin C. Bibbs, Sr. (InterVarsity Press, 2009). A 12-session guide for individual or group study, complete with Bible studies, conversation questions, and ideas to spark interest in serving the world.


Living the Works of Mercy: Daring Teens to Change the World, by Ellen P. Cavanaugh (Saint Mary’s Press, 2003). A thoughtful, Catholic-oriented guide to creating opportunities for Christian faith to come alive through “works of mercy” (i.e., visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, etc.). Includes outlines for two retreat possibilities.

“Be Hungry: 30-Hour Famine Curriculum.” A four-module curriculum developed by the Fuller Youth Institute to support 30-Hour Famine events, including video, PowerPoint presentations, and Bible studies. Materials are useful for adapting for other hunger and poverty-related programs. Available at http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/resources/curriculum.

Institute for Peace and Justice. Catholic-affiliated organization providing resources for peace and justice, including a resource section for youth ministry leaders. www.ipj-ppj.org

Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Office for Social Justice. A Catholic-oriented organization providing resources to encourage social justice, including helpful resources that compare the concepts of charity and justice. www.osjspm.org


Youth Serve America. An international nonprofit resource center, providing resources for children, youth, and young adults to engage in community service. www.ysa.org

National Youth Leadership Council. Publishes numerous resources, programs, and training for youth involvement in service learning, including some free downloads. www.nylc.org or (651) 631-3672.

ELCA World Hunger Program. Resources and information concerning local and international hunger issues, including opportunities to respond. Includes resources for children and youth.
www.elca.org/hunger or 1-800-638-3522. Resources produced by Augsburg Fortress can be ordered from www.augsburgfortress.org/elcahunger.

Lutheran Peace Fellowship. An organization dedicated to encouraging Christians to be peacemakers and justice seekers. Provides a number of youth-appropriate resources. www.lutheranpeace.org

IDEAS FOR SERVICE PROJECTS


“Journeys for Youth and Young Adults.” An annual catalogue of servant learning opportunities and hunger/justice programs across the United States, produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Available at www.elca.org/camps/journeys.html or 1-800-638-3522.


The Giraffe Heroes Project. Provides resources to motivate children and teens to make a difference in the lives of others. Includes ideas for incorporating service learning into activities. www.giraffe.org


VolunteerMatch. An online database of volunteer opportunities with local nonprofit organizations. www.volunteermatch.org

Action Without Borders. A comprehensive website to introduce youth and young adults to international volunteer service opportunities, searchable by geographic location or type of service. www.idealist.org

“A Year of Servanting Ideas.” A website with numerous service project ideas, appropriate to the month or season, provided by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS). http://servantevents.lcms.org/new/yrofserv.asp
The Source 4 Youth Ministry. A website with dozens of ideas for youth outreach and service projects.  www.thesource4ym.com/outreacheventideas

Do Something. A comprehensive website to inspire youth to community service and connect young people with local volunteer opportunities. Provides information on a variety of opportunities for community engagement, including the environment, violence, hunger, discrimination, and disaster response.  www.dosomething.org

Egad! Ideas. Comprehensive, user-updated site with ideas for service projects and mission trips.  www.egadideas.com

Souper Bowl of Caring. An organization encouraging fundraising support for local hunger-related charities on or near Super Bowl Sunday. A “starter kit” (including DVD, handouts, and promotional materials) is available at www.souperbowl.org.

30-Hour Famine. Sponsored by World Vision, the 30-Hour Famine is an international youth movement to raise awareness and take action on global hunger issues. Comprehensive resources (including video, handouts, and promotional materials) are available free of charge for program leaders. More information available at www.30hourfamine.org or 1-800-7-FAMINE.

World Vision. An international mission and relief organization dedicating to alleviating effects of poverty, hunger, and disease.  www.worldvision.org

Wheatridge Ministries. A charitable organizations the supports church-related health and human care ministries with the intention of growing healthy neighborhoods and communities.  www.wheatridge.org

ELCA Good Gifts Catalog. A catalog of global gift giving opportunities. Provides fundraising ideas, including hosting a local fair, to support global missions.  www.elca.org/goodgifts

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. A full-service fraternal benefits and financial services organization, with local chapters engaged in community service efforts. Local chapters also provide grant funds for service-oriented projects.  www.thrivent.com

SERVICE LEARNING PROCESS / METHODOLOGY


Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. An organization dedicated to education and training in Robert Greenleaf’s servant leadership model. www.greenleaf.org