



Service Learning Overview, Model & Outcomes

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“It Feels Good to Serve!”

As more and more churches are planning local, national, or international servant events, and as more high schools and colleges integrate service components into regular coursework, thousands of young people are being given the opportunity to serve others in a wide range of settings. Service projects and mission trips aren't new to Christian churches, of course, though their emphasis in recent years is notable. In fact, some Christian leaders contend that true Christian living *requires* serving others in Christ's name. And so, youth groups embark on overseas mission trips, gather for a couple of hours to tackle a local project, and everything in between. It is exciting to see such importance placed on ministry to those in need and caring for God's creation! After such experiences, teenagers often report emotionally-strong feelings such as pleasure, satisfaction, enjoyment, or gratification ... It does feel good to serve.

Whatever the context, however, youth often experience these service projects as a one-time-only event, with very little or no reflection on the experience. Without adequate preparation and follow-up, the feelings can quickly fade and simply become a “mountain top experience” of the past. While the objective of a mission trip might be to impact and change a young person's life, over time a teenager can return to the same habits and patterns as before. What if the effects of the experience could be long-lasting --even *transforming*-- for a teenager?

What is Service Learning?

One difficulty with the term “service learning” is that it is still evolving and is used differently among organizations and institutions that make use of it. There is general agreement, however, that the pairing of service with learning activities creates fertile ground for learning.

A working definition for service learning

Service learning is an intentional process of teaching and experiential learning that uses hands-on service and reflective thinking to provide richness and meaning to service experiences.

intentional

Service learning experiences are planned with clear goals and learning objectives.

process

Service learning experiences include elements beyond the service activity, including adequate preparation and follow-up.

experiential learning

A method of learning that utilizes service opportunities as the key component around which learning is accomplished.

hands-on service

Allows young people to “get their hands dirty” and gain first-hand knowledge of a particular community, context, or issue.

reflective thinking

Service learning employs critical thinking skills to process the service experience and as a tool for learning.

richness and meaning

Service learning experiences can have deep and lasting impact on those who serve and those being served.

Service learning has its roots in the American education 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. One of the movement’s early pioneers, John Dewey, “believed that a child’s education at school should develop from life experiences” and sought to teach children through activities that were familiar to them.¹ Over a century later, this method of teaching is considered foundational in modern education practices.

The concept of service learning utilizes this educational process, centering opportunities for learning on service engagements. What better way is there to learn or be challenged than by actually experiencing something first-hand?

Two key components of service learning are the *experiential nature of the service* and *purposeful reflection*.

Other Definitions for Service Learning

Service Learning is a method of teaching and learning that deepens understanding by engaging in hands-on service with the community, while gaining knowledge and skills that integrate with learning goals.

– Holly Johnson, *Service Learning in Congregations*

Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity change both for the recipient and the provider of service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content.

– *Service-Learning Is ...*

Service-learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves.

– Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles, *Where’s the Learning in Service-Learning?*

Experiential learning allows for “real-time” education, “rather than only to draw upon generalized and abstract knowledge.”² 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.

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.³

Service learning done in the context of a Christian environment takes the process one step further, allowing youth to apply the perspective of their Christian faith to service experiences. 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.

Acts 1:8

Jesus to the disciples: “... And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Matthew 22:37-39

[Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 5:6-7, 9

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled ... Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy ... Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

I Peter 4:10

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

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?

What Service Learning is Not

To aid in grasping the concept of service learning, it is perhaps helpful to first describe what it 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.”⁴ Service learning is an *intentional* process for teaching and learning – not accidental.

Service learning is not merely fulfilling curricular requirements

Service learning has become a growing trend in higher education as a method of teaching complex concepts. There is also an increased prevalence of service learning in K-12 educational institutions. These programs, however, are often short-term volunteer opportunities used to fulfill curricular requirements, or give focus to the learning component more than the importance of serving. Service learning is not to be seen as curricular requirements for schools, youth groups, Confirmation classes, civic organizations or as a punishment.

Service learning cannot 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.

The Service Learning Process

The service learning process is a tool to aid youth and adults in intentional planning of service experiences that produce longer-term, transforming effects on youth and adults.

Service learning activities are planned with a four-stage process:

preparation

Anticipation of, and preparation for, a service experience.

action

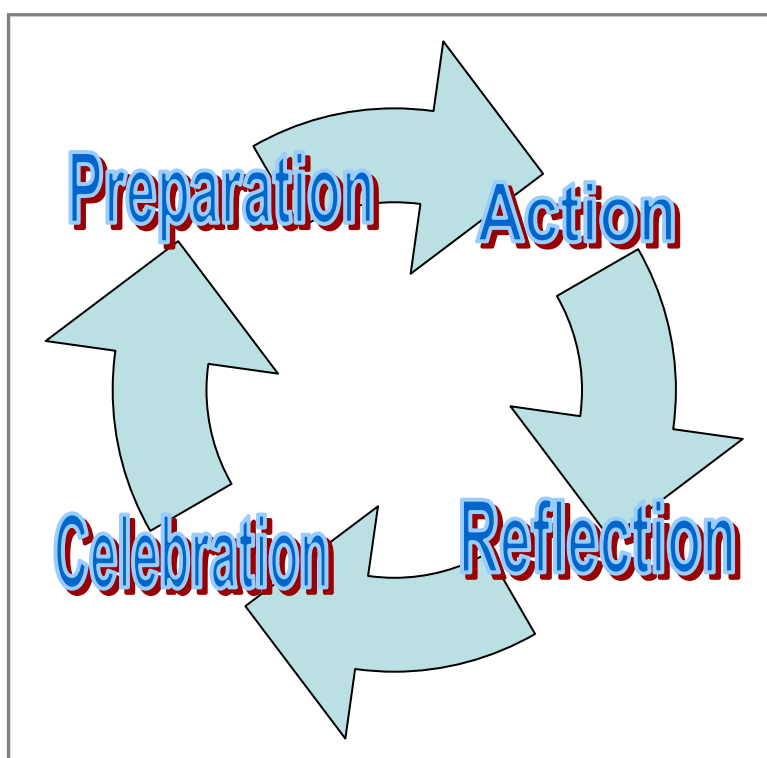
Engaging in a meaningful service experience.

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.



The Outcome: Transformed Lives

After engaging in the service learning process, Christian young people can be transformed. This transformation is a process in which youth 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!" (II Corinthians 5:17). Through these experiences of unselfish service toward, with, and on behalf of others, young people are "new," 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.

Through service learning, 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 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 for their life and deepen their sense of vocation.

The Power of Service Learning – An Example

Service Project: Forty youth and adults from three local congregations travel to Mexico to build two new 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, create poetry, etc., 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.

Teenagers’ 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.*

Teenagers’ responses to the service project, with an opportunity for preparation and reflective thinking:

- *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?*

Elements of the Service Learning Model

Stage 1: Preparation

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

Determining 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 process.

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 Asian children, or to deepen awareness of another culture, start by naming your principle 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.⁵

Another approach is to determine which existing service activities your group is already involved in and how you might enrich those present experiences with the integration of service learning components, such as a greater focus on preparation or post-service reflection. This method still requires careful planning of the key learning objectives to ensure that service activities have a distinct purpose.

Types of Service Experiences

Consider an activity in one of these areas:

Direct Service: Responds to a basic need and is directed at the symptoms of an issue.

Examples: providing shelter for homeless families, tutoring children, rebuilding homes after a hurricane.

Education: Researches an issue and educates others; might examine systems and root causes.

Example: inviting community leaders or residents to talk about the challenges and realities of living in a neighborhood where business and factories are closing.

Advocacy: Proposes laws or regulations and speaks on behalf of others; can address symptoms or root causes, but may not empower the people most affected.

Example: writing letters to a legislator or city council member about a community problem.

Direct Action/Organizing: Organizes people to work on long-term solutions directed at the root causes of an issue and empowering citizens to speak and work for change.

Example: organizing a meeting of community leaders and residents to address a lack of public transportation in a neighborhood.

- Adapted from Holly Johnson, Service Learning in Congregations

Questions to get you thinking about the service project include:

- Who do we want to serve?
- What issues are important to our group?
- What are the pressing needs of our community (or world)?
- What issues in the community concern you?
- Do we want to work directly with people, or “behind the scenes?”
- Who are we already connected to?

Preparing for the Service Project

After determining learning objectives and selecting a service project comes the task of preparing the group for the experience. Suggested activities for the Preparation stage are as follows:⁶

Content

- Share what the project will look like (where it is, who will be served, the group’s role in service, etc.).
- Discuss what type of preparation or training will be required or provided.

Relevant Issues

- Conduct a Bible study on service and the call of Christians to serve others in daily life.
- 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 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.
- 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).
- Act out role plays that demonstrate possible situations at the service site.⁷

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 ...”⁸

- Design community building activities for the group so they can begin to know one another before the service project.
- 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 project leaders.
- 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 learn how to lead small groups and understand group dynamics.

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.
- Screen adult volunteers as required by the service site or your church.
- Collect medical release forms from all participants and other documents your group requires for activities.
- Review health and safety issues. Determine a plan for emergency procedures in the event of an accident.
- Determining logistical details may involve an initial visit to the site by the group leader(s) or the entire group.
- International travel adds another set of challenges. Be sure you have made arrangements for appropriate government paperwork, travel documents, insurance, and vaccinations.

Blessing

- 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.

Challenges for 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.

Don't tell them 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. (See “Know What You Are Capable of Doing.”) If the group's leadership is new to planning service projects, start small.

Know What You Are Capable of Doing

An effective program ensures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved. 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. Where appropriate, a carefully planned succession or combination of participants can provide the continuity of service needed.

– E.P. Honnet and S.J. Poulen, *Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning: A Wingspread Special Report*

Stage 2: Action

Engaging in a meaningful service experience.

Meaningful Service Has Many Faces

The beauty 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 and gathered⁹ a unique group to serve in Jesus' name for that particular time.

This 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!

What are *you* doing at the Action stage?

- organizing a peace march or walk for hunger
- writing letters to state and federal legislators about social issues
- praying for the world
- holding an educational event on hunger, drugs, racism, etc.
- creating a recycling program for your church or neighborhood
- visiting and reading stories with nursing home residents
- planting trees
- sponsoring a child from another country
- writing letters of encouragement to missionaries
- developing a church-based tutoring program for elementary children
- collecting socks for the homeless
- organizing a study/discussion group on an important social issue
- making school kits or health kits for international relief agencies
- sponsoring a refugee family
- installing new playground equipment in a neglected park
- presenting a workshop on the AIDS epidemic in Africa
- collecting clothing for a local clothing bank
- offering a free Saturday of baby sitting to parents of young children
- planning a creative fundraiser for a local organization
- organizing a food drive
- planting a community garden
- serving a meal at a local shelter
- creating healthy food baskets for emergency shelters
- performing yard work for elderly members of your church or neighborhood
- building a skate park for local teenagers
- packing food boxes at a food bank distribution warehouse

Other Action Activities

The Action stage might also include these activities (as relevant to your situation):

- The group should receive an orientation to the service site, including its purpose, philosophy and history, and how this group's role is significant.
- Make clear the expectations you have for individuals and the group. It may be helpful to briefly review the group covenant as you gather. If working with an organization, make sure you understand their expectations for volunteers.
- Create opportunities for community building during the experience.
- Review safety concerns specific to the site or project. Have copies of medical release forms on-site. If necessary, have a first-aid kit available and know where a telephone is in case of an emergency. (Always plan for an emergency; they often happen in the least expected times!)
- Be flexible in responding to unforeseen circumstances. Despite careful planning, service projects may not turn out as you had originally planned or hoped. 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.
- Begin some of your reflection activities during the event. This could include journal reflections close to the action, or conversations while they are working. Always be thinking of ways to use the present moment.

The Role of Those Being Served in the Service Project

Carl Dudley says, "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."¹⁰ Instead, 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. Immediately, a hierarchical relationship is established in which there is one who gives and one who receives.

Some service learning writers and community organizers advocate for the members of the community being served to 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.¹¹

To make this happen, find a way listen to an individual or community residents as part of the Preparation stage, encouraging them to share their concerns and visions for their community.¹² When such an arrangement is not possible, make sure that “program planners have taken seriously the perspectives and priorities of community residents.”¹³

Involving Recipients of Service

The actual recipients of service, as well as the community groups and constituencies to which they belong, must have the primary role in defining their own service needs. Community service programs, government agencies, and private organizations can also be helpful in defining what service tasks are needed and when and how these tasks should be performed.
– E.P. Honnet and S.J. Poulen, *Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning: A Wingspread Special Report*

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 us. 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 for talking, sharing, eating, or playing together.

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!

Challenges for the Action Stage

Don't underestimate the service you are doing

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 others 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 others.¹⁴

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 they are serving with. Take note of these seemingly insignificant events and process them later ... They can be the moments that are engraved on their memory for years to come.

Stage 3: Reflection

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

The Reflection stage has been called the “operational linchpin” of the service learning process. In critical reflection, individuals create meaning and gain new knowledge from their experiences ... often in “Ah-ha!” moments. Youth and adults together can share, analyze, and evaluate experiences and can reinforce or form new opinions.

Reflection in the Experiential Learning Cycle¹⁵

In the mid 1980s, psychologist David Kolb presented his action-reflection theory as the Experiential Learning Cycle, a process of learning that begins with an actual experience and leads naturally through a four-stage process of sharing, processing, generalizing, and applying what they have experienced. Simply put, Kolb suggests that the human mind moves quite quickly, and repeatedly, through stages of the questions “What?,” “So what?,” and “Now what?” in an attempt to process and learn from the experience. (Kolb’s theory is somewhat similar to John Dewey’s thinking, mentioned earlier, though it took about 80 years for fruition in the American education system.) It is important to remember that each member of your group may learn differently in the various stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle. “However, by including [activities in] all the stages, every student, at some point, has an opportunity to learn in the most comfortable style for him or her.”¹⁶

Strategies for Reflective Thinking Using the ORID Method

The Reflection stage can be conducted in a number of ways. The most common method is by asking questions in small or large group conversations; a second common method is individual journal writing.

The ORID Method (objective, reflective, interpretive, decisional) is a group facilitation method that follows a natural thought pattern much like Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle. Questions at each step can be employed in large or small group conversations, or posed for written reflection.

Importance of Reflection in the Experiential Learning Process

The service experience alone does not insure that either significant learning or effective service will occur. It is important that programs build in structured opportunities for participants to think about their experience and what they have learned. Through discussions with others and individual reflection on moral questions and relevant issues, participants can develop a better sense of social responsibility, advocacy, and active citizenship. This reflective component allows for personal growth and is most useful when it is intentional and continuous throughout the experience, and when opportunity for feedback is provided.

– E.P. Honnet and S.J. Poulen, *Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning: A Wingspread Special Report*

Examples of questions at each stage are provided¹⁷; select appropriate questions and tailor them to your particular context.

Objective (getting facts):

Have participants describe the activity they were involved in using concrete examples.

- What did you do today? What was your role?
- Describe the people you met today. What were your interactions like?
- How did people respond to you?
- Were you comfortable or uncomfortable today?
- Did anything frustrate you?
- Who in the group surprised you?
- Describe the atmosphere. What did you see and hear?
- Where did you see God at work?
- What happened as a result of your work? Who or what will see a benefit?

Reflective (addressing emotional responses):

Introduce questions that invite the feelings of their experience.

- What was this experience like for you?
- Did you have any feelings that surprised you?
- How did it feel to serve?
- What did you appreciate (about another person, the site, your experience, etc.)?
- What is new in your relationship with God?
- Do you feel like you contributed to something good?
- How have your assumptions or stereotypes been challenged by the experience?

Interpretive (considering the meaning or purpose of the experience):

Introduce questions that invite what they think about the experience.

- What did you learn?
- What did the experience make you think about?
- What was going through your mind today?
- How was your experience different than the expectations you had beforehand?
- Who determines what is best (for people, for the community, for the Earth, etc.)?
- How is this experience related to other areas of your life?

Decisional (determining next action):

Challenge participants to incorporate their experience into an action.

- What would you do, or will you do, differently next time?
- What new opinions have you formed?
- How will this experience affect your future?
- What might you change in your life from this experience?
- What is God calling you to do with this experience?
- How does this experience challenge you to live as a Christian in the world?

Creative Reflection Methods

While group conversation and written reflections are two effective ways 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 gifts among participants. Because our society values a person's abilities to speak and write, inviting creative means of expression might be unfamiliar or uncomfortable to some participants. It will certainly be welcomed and appreciated by others. Nevertheless, encourage alternative forms of expression such as:

- using popular music with themes relative to the experience
- story telling
- writing poetry or songs
- writing a story from another person's experience
- painting
- sharing photographs
- producing a video
- computer-aided graphic design
- use of *lectio divina*

Challenges for the Reflection Stage

Easy to delay or put off

The Reflection stage can be neglected if it is delayed after the event. The best learning moments come in the time immediately following the service experience, but for a variety of reasons (time constraints, distractions) it is put off or even forgotten.

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 a variety of responses, but are not the best questions to allow youth to have meaningful, active reflection that leads to learning.

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.

Reflection is Critical

To enhance student-learning, it is critical that instructors devote time and attention to designating reflection activities. Reflection is the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives.

– Julie Hatcher, Indiana University Center for Public Service and Leadership

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.

Some youth are uncomfortable sharing in groups

Not everyone is comfortable sharing in front of groups. And the bigger the group, the scarier it can be! Attempt to create a safe, comfortable environment for conversation. Leaders can present guidelines for the conversation, including respecting the person speaking and honoring confidentiality. Even so, never force a young person to share if he or she appears uncomfortable. Try using smaller groups (such as pairs or triads) to allow for intimate conversation. (This is also a good reason for employing the variety of creative reflection methods listed above.)

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 member of the group may have a "live 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 for diversity of feelings.

Stage 4: 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 offers an opportunity for young people to honor the work accomplished and to continue to tell the stories of their experiences. 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.

Ideas for Celebration Activities

A number of suggestions for activities to do at the Celebration stage:

- As your group returns from the service project, have a group that is waiting to receive them. This allows them to immediately share their experiences with someone who is willing to listen. This is especially meaningful when returning from extended service projects (such as an international mission trip).
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Provide for recognition of individuals who were heavily 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. Celebrate the numerous gifts that God has given God's people!
- 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.

- Consider the 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.
- Thank the host agency or community that received you.
- If the service project was especially memorable to those involved, consider holding another celebration months or years later. Discuss how the experience continues to influence them.

Evaluation of the Service Learning Process

A sub-section 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 actual planning and implementing of your service learning plan.

Suggested evaluation questions include:¹⁸

- Did we identify a worthwhile need to address? Were the learning objectives appropriate?
- Were our learning objectives met?
- Did we involve youth in the right way?
- How adequately did we prepare youth and adults for this experience?
- 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?
- What do we do next?

Challenges for 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 for the stage *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.

Outcomes of the Service Learning Process

*Service learning leads to
life transformation
where young people grow
in compassion, community, advocacy,
lifelong servanthood, leadership,
and exploration of vocation.*



Service Learning Outcomes Defined

(1) Compassion

Outcome

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."¹⁹ 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.

Biblical references

- Luke 10:25-37: Parable of the Good Samaritan
- Luke 15:11-32: Parable of the Prodigal Son
- Colossians 3:12-14: A call to care for each other

(2) Community

Outcome

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

Service to others in Jesus' name draws people into community. As young people serve others, they are called into relationships with others like themselves. A call to Christian discipleship "includes a call to become a member of a new community (Mark 3:20-35; Mark 10:28)."²⁰ Beyond a sense of 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). This fellowship and connectedness is a product of the Holy Spirit, who calls, gathers, enlightens, and

sanctifies the whole Church. In some cases, this 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).²¹ 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.

Jesus calls his followers to love one another, just as we are called to love the Lord our God (Mark 12:28-31).

Jesus commands his followers to express their love of neighbor (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 to 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 Lord²² (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

(3) Advocacy

Outcome

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

Solidarity

Solidarity is action on behalf of the one human family, calling us to help overcome the divisions in our world. Solidarity binds the rich to the poor. It makes the free zealous for the cause of the oppressed. It drives the comfortable and secure to take risks for the victims of tyranny and war. It calls those who are strong to care for those who are weak and vulnerable across the spectrum of human life. It opens homes and hearts to those in flight from terror and to migrants whose daily toil supports affluent lifestyles. Peacemaking ... is the work of solidarity.

– *Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997.*

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. 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 the “next step” ahead of meeting needs. Jesus himself moved past purely meeting needs; instead, he moves to the deeper issues. With the Samaritan woman drawing water from Jacob’s well, he recognized her 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.”²³ Advocacy becomes faith-in-action and our faith demands an active response. Tony Campolo said, “It is vitally important that Christians be involved in ministry to those who are suffering and oppressed ... 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.”²⁴ Pursuing 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

(4) Lifelong Servanthood

Outcome

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. 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 their 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 "least of these" is serving Christ
- Matthew 4:18-22: Jesus calling the disciples
- John 17:1-19: Jesus prays for the disciples

(5) Leadership

Outcome

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.²⁵ Providing leadership opportunities within the context of service learning activities can also increase a youth's skills in leadership, organization, public speaking, decision making, and problem solving.²⁶

Youth possess the gifts for leadership, but they are often not invited to 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, II 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" (I 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. Youth 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

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

(6) Exploration of Vocation

Outcome

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 on their life (vocation). 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 his creative and redeeming Word to all the world."²⁷

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."²⁸ While pastoral ministry is a noble calling, "the goal of the vocational journey is not necessarily to become a professional minister."²⁹ Instead, the goal is to give power to all of God's people to find their unique place among the community of the faithful.

God's call is not reserved to an elitist group, but is available to all who listen and respond.³⁰ Martin Luther said that "no one is without some commission and calling."³¹ Individual vocations are bestowed to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12). 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."

An important reminder: Vocation requires discernment, an intentional *process* of acknowledging, exploring, and testing one's gifts and the desire to serve³². As opposed to a singular decision or moment in time, the process of determining vocation can be life-long and changing.

What's the difference?

Vocation: The calling that God has for your life. *Example:* "My vocation is to serve others, especially women and children, who have a limited voice in society."

Career: The way you will accomplish your vocation. *Example:* "I have chosen a career in public policy."

Job: The specific work you do in your career. *Example:* "My job is to serve as a lobbyist for a public policy organization that works on behalf of local churches to enact and change laws that better serve under-represented women and children."

Biblical references

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