

Service and Outreach Projects



Children are not too young to be taught to care and to learn that one person can make a difference, that as a person of faith we are called to care for the sick, the needy, and the friendless. Our youth must be taught to see the needs of the world and do something. They must be mentored to believe in their ability to get the job done by taking action. Outreach must become a natural part of their Christian response to our world (and not just a holiday project).

What's going on around you? Better yet, what's not going on around you? Everybody needs help sometimes, some way, but who around you needs specific help now? And don't forget that you also need help and get lots of it from many persons and you'll keep on needing help. This is a useful idea to remember as you think about being helpful to others.

Or think of it this way: What useful things can your youth group do around the church building? At the Y? With scouts? Community centers? Hospitals? Homes? Do you have a volunteer bureau or a Voluntary Action Center in your community? Ask.

And then there are issue-oriented service activities: voter registration programs, pollution control activities, political campaigns (yep!), programs dealing with drugs, runaways, and so on. Community organization to empower the powerless is another way to serve.

Now we're getting down to the nitty-gritty, the kind of service that really means something: dealing with issues, changing the system.

That's where a lot of young people want to be. "I want service that is meaningful," said one young person. "I don't want bedpan duty." It's a challenge to try to change the system, and it needs changing, no doubt about that. It's understandable that many youth want to take the glory road of effecting social change rather than emptying bedpans. But, dear friend, what kind of new system can be created by persons who lack the human compassion and humility to empty bedpans?

Occasional service will occur when there is an unusual event. Something happens. A need is evident. You do something about it. After a flood or fire or accident or tragedy, you organize your group to clean up or gather food and clothing or provide child care or just be there or whatever else is needed.

Ongoing service settings are more likely in that for many people the needs go on and on. But in either ongoing or occasional service settings, make careful plans so that your group can provide adequate personnel for the service needed for the period of time designated. Don't complicate the lives of people by offering more than you can deliver. Make certain you have the skills and capabilities needed. This means careful assessment of proposed projects for middle and high schoolers alike.

~ From the Handbook for Ministries with Young Adolescents / The Episcopal Church Center, 1996.

Guidelines (adapted from the Handbook for Ministries with Young Adolescents / The Episcopal Church Center, 1996)

1. Start in your own community

Looking at the needs in your own community is more difficult, but may have an even greater impact on your group. It's also easier to plan and much less expensive. It's much more glamorous to take a trip to an exotic place for a service trip, but does the experience justify the cost. Preparations, transportation, rooms, meals, supplies, time and energy all need to be considered.

2. Take a long hard look at unmet needs

Who could benefit from a few hours of your group's service? Reading to those with limited vision, helping parents with young children, bring food to shut in, sitting with the lonely in a hospital or home could all be easily accomplished. Your group could also look at local issues – public transportation, local education and food for the hungry are some of the many issues that get decided by local government. Your group to take on an issue, educate themselves about it, and speak at local hearings.

3. Plan carefully

It is important to remember that a congregation is a body of persons acting corporately in worship and in service. So whenever possible, plan with the rector and/or other members of your congregation. Things to think about

- The needs in your community
- The cost (time, energy and dollars)
- Needed skills (are you up to the job)
- Size of the job (is it a specific task or an ongoing project)
- Transportation
- Sleeping, cooking and eating (if it's for longer than a few hours)
- Supervision and adult mentors
- Supplies needed
- Recreation (try to plan fun into the activity)
- Worship (also include time for prayer and worship)
- Debrief and reflection

4. Examine Your Motives

Why do you want to serve? Many reasons are purely selfish, but for many it become meaningful. Jesus spoke of becoming a servant to others and gave freely of his time to help others. How can we freely offer ourselves to service?

5. Anticipate Trouble

While most of the typical service projects (visiting nursing homes, reading to children, etc.) will be applauded, actions that advocate social change in the arenas of race, poverty, drug culture, peace, gender issues or anything else that frees, liberates, and empowers people, you will be met with opposition. People telling you to not rock the boat or that you're being too controversial.

Remember to include parents, church officials, community leaders and professional leaders in service agencies as you're planning. And ask the following questions "Who is likely to be critical? About what? Why? How do you

get potentially critical people in your planning? How do you get objectors involved?"

And don't forget the kind of trouble that comes with any logistical planning. From missed flights to flat tires to one of the mentors getting sick. How are you going to deal with trouble? What's your back up plan? Who can you call for help?

6. Experiment

This is an opportunity to try new roles, new relationships, and even new occupations and careers. Allow people in your group to try new things, ask many questions and meet new people.

7. Evaluate

Go beyond the questions of "did you like it?" and "what can we do better next time." Ask people what they got from the entire experience (from planning all the way through). You can use the questions from a typical debriefing session, with a few changes:

1. Review

(How was it?)

2. What Was Your Task

(What did you have to accomplish, what did you do?)

3. Did you notice....

(that it took much longer the first time, that Susie's voice got louder, that the red ball never went through the blue box?)

4. Why did this happen?

5. How does this connect with your day to day life?

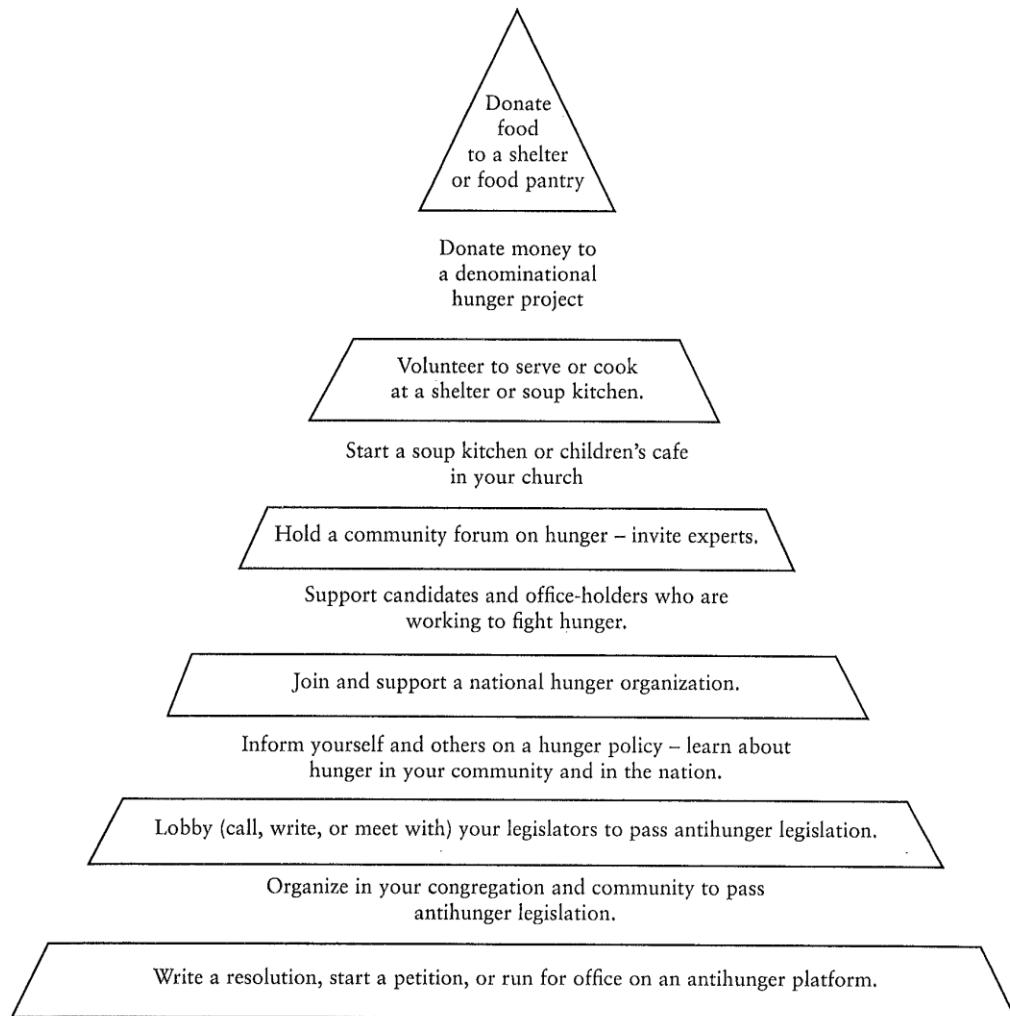
6. How does this apply to faith?

7. How can we use what we learned in other parts of the world?

8. Enjoy yourself

You're not going as an expert, so it's alright to mess up. Use what you do have (energy, enthusiasm, muscle and some skill). And plan for moments of fun and celebration!

Pyramid of Action



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