

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Isaiah 1:17

Mission and service opportunities can be more than an annual mission trip. Short term mission experiences are also important and can be integrated as part of a youth's life.

Mission and service imparts opportunities where youth and their leaders participate together to grow in faith, service, and the ability to relate to others. As Christians our belief in God, Christ and the Holy Spirit requires each of us to be involved in Christian mission and service to the world. "Love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal of the life of the world." Service both flows out of our faith and feeds our faith.

Both long term or short term service and mission projects help form youth with the understanding that service can be done anywhere—and should be done wherever one finds oneself in day-to-day living. Mission opportunities present ways to broaden one's thinking, take one out of one's comfort zone, and confer the confidence to be of even greater service once one returns home to regular lives, routines and usual surroundings.

Mission and service programs and projects are adventures whether they are a couple of hours long or a full week or more away. They are never intended to be just drive –by –feel good excursions but are to be formational and transformational requiring both preparation and reflection allowing the participants to grow and go deeper into God's heart for justice and shalom. We must always have well made plans about where we're going and what we'll be doing when, but ultimately, it is openness to the Spirit that makes it a transformational and growing encounter.

The before, during and after portions of your mission and service projects might include discussions to get students thinking about poverty, hunger, homelessness, cross-cultural relationships etc. depending on the mission project that they will be participating in. Identifying and learning about one's own spiritual gifts that will be used is a significant understanding. Discussion of teamwork, community and behavior covenants is also important. Reflection following the service project and sharing of insights is very important as is discussion about how to continue service once returning home to the "real world". Providing forms of advocacy enriches the project too and equips youth for continuing ministry.

These approaches provide youth settings to help them learn about themselves, their relationship with God, their teammates, and the world we as Christians are called to love and serve. These before, during and after processes will help your youth apply what they've learned through mission and service to their own lives and will ensure justice work that changes participants to continue to change the world around them. Youth are not just the hope of the church for tomorrow; they are the leadership of the church today. With energy, vision, enthusiasm and motivated by deep faith, youth actively participate in mission - transforming the world and themselves in the process.

Try short term mission projects with local service agencies. They might include your local food pantry, soup kitchen or feeding program, working with service agencies in your community who serve people who are homeless, differently-abled or need food assistance. These experiences might enable more youth to be engaged especially those that are not be able to participate in a "week long" mission trip. Short term mission projects as well as week long mission trips can revitalize your entire youth program.