

What About Service?

Service Is Foundational

For a group of youth and adults becoming disciples, service is foundational. Through youth ministry we do the work of Christ. We are called to be in ministry, “to put feet to our faith.”

With God’s grace, we dare to respond to the challenge of Matthew 25:40—“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Service is a natural, necessary expression of faith in Christ, of becoming a disciple. Being in service to others does not make us special or deserving of favors. This avenue of ministry is simply what we are called to do—from love, in love—as the people of God.

How do we integrate reflection and learning with service? Service learning can take many forms. Keep these points in mind as you choose and carry out your ministry of service.

1. When selecting a service project, don’t make assumptions about who needs help and what type of help is needed. This can be insulting, even when intentions are well-meaning. Being asked to help is more important and should be the only entrance into doing mission work.
2. All those interested in a service opportunity should share in the work of developing the service activity, planning the details, and reflecting on that work.
3. Inventory the skill level of those youth who are interested. Those interested need to be truly able to do the work required. Can this be an opportunity to involve adults with special skills in your congregation or community?

4. Genuine commitment to the task is critical. To carry the project through to completion, conscientious work and faithful attendance at work sessions will be required. People will be counting on you to finish what you begin.
5. Nurture caring, not condescending, attitudes toward those served. Christian service springs from Christian love that is not patronizing. It does not congratulate itself, nor does it parade around saying, "Oh, you poor people, look what we nice youth are doing for you." We may not always be greeted with reciprocal openness and respect, but that is not the issue. Negative responses should never deter us from Christian caring.
6. The project should be within your budget ability. Be sure you can meet the project's monetary requirements.
7. Consider time required versus time youth can realistically give.
8. Responsible reflection occurs before, during, and after the project. Some reflection questions include:
 - Is this particular project a genuine need we are invited to meet?
 - What are some of the facts related to this need?
 - What biblical insights prepared us to go in the spirit of Christ?
 - Did we need specialized help from others?
 - What happened to us in the midst of the project?
 - How would we describe our own working relationships?
 - Did any of our feelings change as we worked?
 - How would we evaluate the activity?
 - What Biblical images or stories does the work remind us of?
 - What were the strengths of what we did?
 - What were some weaknesses in what we did?
 - If we had it to do over again, what project elements would we keep? Which ones would we change?

Finally, remember to consider and to discuss the real reasons why you want to serve others. Serving is a way of understanding Christ and Christ's mission on earth. Serving is a way of connecting faith with life. Serving is a lifestyle choice, not a one-time enterprise. Don't serve to alleviate guilt or to feel better about yourself. Don't serve to be appreciated or applauded. Serve because Christ served others. Serve because it is the right thing to do. Serve because you want to live your faith and not just talk about it.

Service Ministry in the Congregation

Here are a few examples of how youth can minister through service to their own church. In choosing activities, base the service on genuine needs. Never twist service into busy work, or see it as an end in itself (done just so you can say you did something).

In the church program and around the building:

- Cleanup.
- Yard work.
- Fix-up and repair.
- Ushering.
- Regular maintenance.
- Office work.
- Running errands.
- Painting.
- Food preparation.
- Developing and maintaining a church website.

Service ministry to congregation members:

- Emergency housekeeping.
- Yard work.
- Transportation.
- Friendship calls.
- Visiting the sick and people who have limited ability to leave home.
- Running errands.

Service Ministry to the Local Community

Begin by partnering with existing organizations. More care needs to be exercised as youth go forth into an arena less acquainted with the church and Jesus Christ. Possibilities include:

- Programs at healthcare facilities.
- Programs for older adults, including those at retirement homes.
- Programs for children.
- Meals on Wheels program.
- Red Cross activities.
- Gleaning.
- Soup kitchens.

- Shelters for homeless or battered persons.
- Home repair work camps.
- Habitat for Humanity.
- Teaching literacy.
- Tutoring.
- Other needs in your community can be found by calling your local United Way or by looking under "social services" in your telephone book.

Service Ministry Beyond the Local Community

This level involves the highest level of advanced planning. This requires more skill and a much longer lead time to get the details worked out and lined up. A few possibilities include:

- Regional and national work camps.
- Relief and disaster assistance.
- Rebuilding after disaster.
- Hunger programs.

Long-distance service opportunities exist in abundance. Many organizations have been in the business of serving others for years. Some of the better publicized agencies rely on the word of mouth of those who have served with them. Check with other youth ministers in your area who have worked with these agencies. Ask for:

- A critique of the organizations with which they have worked.
- Candid reflections about positives and negatives.
- Costs involved with these projects: registration fees, room and board fees, donations of dollars and supplies, and transportation costs.
- The values and goals of individual organizations. Be aware that a portion of registration fees may be "for profit" and may be used to further causes unrelated to missions.

Service Ministry Through and With Others

Many people are already working with youth in your community: senior and junior high school principals, teachers, and guidance counselors; law enforcement officials; social workers; leaders in civic youth-serving organizations; parents and adults working with youth in other churches; and so forth. Join together with these to identify and to minister to the needs of youth in your community.

There are many ways to design service opportunities, both one-day projects and weeklong or longer events. Locally, you can volunteer as part of an organization's existing system. You can cooperate with other church youth groups or agencies to develop a joint effort. You can model your work after something that has already been proven effective. You can even create your own vision of service and put it into action.

There are several issues to consider when cooperating with existing organizations:

- Study the agency and know its values and goals. Make sure its values and goals match those of your denomination and your congregation.
- If either party is uncomfortable with the other, a relationship should not be formed.
- Assure the agency that any unusual expense incurred because of your involvement will be covered by your ministry.
- Insist that the work you are asked to do is not just "busy work." Expect that the work will be challenging and educational, and make sure the agency understands why.

Youth Service Fund

The Youth Service Fund (YSF) is money that is given by youth, administered by youth, and used to serve youth. However, YSF is more than simply raising money. YSF is a commitment made by United Methodist youth to those in need—in their own communities, across the United States, and around the world. Youth Service Fund is an opportunity to witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ.

YSF is the only authorized United Methodist fund directly related to youth. It is the only fund over which youth have primary administrative control. It can truly be considered "second mile" giving, because it does not replace a young person's responsibility for giving to his or her local church program.

YSF benefits people in need. The money raised for YSF supports projects at the annual conference and national levels of The United Methodist Church. On both levels, YSF projects are carefully selected by a committee of youth and adult workers with youth. Each project must address the needs of youth in a concrete and effective manner. For example, YSF money has provided assistance for youth with disabilities,

resources for counseling, support for youth centers, ministries to low-income neighborhoods, and training for career development.

Youth participating in YSF benefit from putting their faith into action as disciples and as stewards. Stewardship is an act of faithful, responsible use of all our resources—skills, time, energies, and money. The vows of church membership commit us to support The United Methodist Church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service. YSF provides one excellent way of making good that commitment.

How does the Youth Service Fund work? Money is raised by youth in a church and is sent to the treasurer of the annual conference. (Your pastor can give you the name and address.) Seventy percent of the money is retained in the annual conference. Of that money at least one third goes to projects within the conference, at least one third goes to projects outside the conference, and one third may be used for YSF education and administration.

Thirty percent of the money raised is sent to the National Youth Ministry Organization of The United Methodist Church to support projects across the United States and in foreign countries. Eighty percent of this amount goes to projects selected by the projects review committee of the steering committee. Twenty percent goes to education and administration.

Find out about the particular projects being sponsored by YSF in your conference and on the national level. Your group members will be more excited about raising and giving money when they know exactly where it is going. Is there a project ministering to the needs of youth in your community that needs funds? Has your UMYF wanted to start a community youth center, yet you don't have enough money? Apply to receive YSF funds from your annual conference, another annual conference, or NYMO.

How Can We Raise Money for YSF?

Individual Gifts

Learning to make an individual financial commitment to the church and its ministries is part of Christian stewardship of money. If every one of the approximately 600,000 United Methodist youth gave one penny a day, there would be \$2,190,000 a year for YSF projects, education, and administration.

Pledges

- Set a definite goal for the amount your group wants to raise.
- Allow youth to decide for themselves how much they will give on a weekly basis. The cost of a candy bar or canned soft drink each day can add up to a large pledge.
- Establish a definite timeline for when the pledge period begins and when you will collect the money. You also may choose to design a worship service to dedicate the money received.

Fundraising Activities

If you choose to organize a fundraiser, plan one that is fun, safe, and provides a real service. Here are some examples:

- Work day: Rake leaves, clean garages, wash windows, paint fences, repair porches, caulk windows, mow yards—all for a fee that goes to YSE. Or advertise that your UMY members are available for a half or full day of free labor, with the persons who take the free labor making a donation to YSF for what the job was worth to them.
- Recycling center: Part of a Christian's response as a good steward has to do with saving and reusing resources. If you have a local outlet that buys used glass, aluminum, or paper, consider setting up a center where people can deposit these items. Whatever you are paid by the buyer(s) of the materials goes to YSE.
- Old favorites: These are the "tried and true" ways of raising money: car wash, rummage sale, spaghetti supper, pancake breakfast, bake sale, and so forth.

For More Help

A wide variety of mission opportunities are listed on the youth ministry pages of The General Board of Discipleship website: www.gbod.org/youth.

For more information about Youth Service Fund projects and promotional materials, write to your annual conference Council on Ministry or The National Youth Ministry Organization, P.O. Box 840, Nashville, TN 37202. (E-mail: NYMO@aol.com)