



SUMMER OF MISSIONS

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Introduction:

Service and missional activities are an important part of being a Christian. Time and time again in the New Testament, Jesus Christ gave instructions in the Bible on how we are to interact with our communities. Mark 12:31 states, "...love your neighbor as yourself." Also, in Matthew 25:31-46, He laid out a framework on how we are to treat those who are in need in our communities, and that this will be reflected as service to our Lord. In a nutshell, the Bible is not just suggesting that we should take care of those in need, but it is directing us to take care of them. Thus, it is important to teach students how they can impact their community through service, and in their own way further the kingdom of God.

In our experience, service projects bring students very close to God, and that they are much more likely to remember the activities than the sermons or Sunday school lessons they've attended. Every student is different and a diverse ministry of activities will bring your students closer to Christ through a variety of ways. Some students will gravitate to worship, some to the study of the Bible, and some to service. It is likely that the very mission trips you attend will be laying the foundation for future missionaries, as well as showing all the students the joys of serving. Thus it is very important that while we are teaching them about the Bible and God through our Bible studies, the church related activities they experience are more than just the fun fellowship they receive through parties and lock-ins. With that in mind, this resource is intended for your own discretion and schedule. While it is important to try to keep students active and involved in church, it is also important that you, as the youth leader, don't burn yourself out through over-scheduling. This is a flexible resource designed for you. Take your time executing the missions, or hammer them out. This is ultimately up to you!

[Leader Note: Here's a reminder from the voice of experience: Be sure to read through the planned activity far enough ahead of the planned date for the activity so that you can appropriate plan for it.]

Week 1: Veteran Care Packages

This is a great activity to plan for Memorial Day weekend and an awesome way to kick off your summer of missions. Ask your pastor and your youth group kids to identify any vets in their family and/or congregation to determine the number of baskets which you need to construct. You can coordinate with your pastor to hand them to the vets in the service on Sunday morning as part of a veteran's recognition. This activity will teach your teens the importance of respecting and being thankful for our veterans, but it will also encourage involvement and relationship between other age groups and the youth group.

Care packages for vets are easy to put together. Ask the teens for volunteers to make cookies and/or baked goods for them. Also, have the teens write hand-written notes thanking them for their service and listing what freedoms they are most thankful for. Make sure that they give credit to the vets for preserving these freedoms. They could also include the sharing of their favorite Bible verses with them.

The care packages can be put together by purchasing containers from a local discount store or stuffed inside gift bags. Other things that could work well in a care package could be non-perishable snacks like canned peanuts or hard candies. At the end of the day, what will make a successful care-package is the personal touch that the teens can put on them. If you're really sneaky, you could get pictures of the vets from relatives and surprise them by having them personalized with photos and favorite things as suggested from their immediate family.

Week Two: Random Acts of Kindness Scavenger Hunt

This missional activity is really fun. It requires the volunteering of several parents with vehicles for about half a day. The random acts of kindness scavenger hunt is simple. At the beginning of the event, everyone meets, and is split into teams which fit into the vehicles available. Make sure you have enough parents for the transportation of those who are planning on attending. Since you are transporting the kids around town, this activity will most likely require permission slips to be filled out. Every team will be handed a list of fun activities which constitute random acts of kindness. Make sure each team has the same list so that it's fair, and make sure that the parents have agreed to drive responsibly with the teens in the vehicles (we have experienced some seriously competitive parents). Instruct the teams that for every activity, they need to explain that they are from their local church (insert name here) and that they are on a scavenger hunt, and then politely ask if they can do their activities. If the business or person refuses, then the team **MUST** politely say thank you and move on. (You can add bonus points to the end of the competition by having the parent escorts judge whether they were appropriately polite in their rejections). It is important to document each activity with pics to prove that they actually accomplished the activities, and/or you can choose to rely on the parent escorts to keep honest score.

Here is a list of potential acts of kindness which are fun and challenges the teens to step out of their comfort zone:

- Head to the local grocery store, and ask if they can sing “you are my sunshine” over the loudspeaker. If no permission is allowed, then find 3 strangers to sing to.
- Head to a local hair salon and volunteer to sweep or clean the floors up.
- Head to local fast food restaurants and volunteer to clean the tables.
- Hand out 3-5 sandwich bags of candy with a small message that says, “Hope this sweetens up your day! God Loves You!”

- Compliment 5 strangers.
- Hold a door for 3 strangers.
- Write a group thank you note to your senior pastor (shameless...I know).
- Say thank you to 3 people currently working a crummy job.
- Get out and dance with someone holding a sign and dancing on the side of the road (video here would be awesome).
- Have one or more of each team call their grandparents and tell them they love them.
- Go on to Facebook and leave a compliment on someone's page (take a screen shot).
- Find a janitor or someone cleaning something and say thank you.
- Make an encouraging sign, and stand on the corner of an intersection showing it to passing traffic for no less than 10 minutes.
- Volunteer to clean 3 windshields at your local gas station.
- Offer to return 5 shopping carts from someone's vehicle at the grocery store.

Week Three: Senior Yard Cleanup

This is an easy one. Find someone elderly in the congregation or area who is currently living alone, and/or needs help with the yard. Make sure that kids bring gloves, work clothes, shoes, appropriate clothing, sunscreen, weather appropriate apparel. Arrange with the senior ahead of time, so that they aren't surprised to see a horde of teenagers descend upon their property. Spend time in the yard, weeding gardens, weed whacking, mowing, raking, picking up sticks. If you have time, and or enough people, you can split teams up amongst multiple houses, or go from house to house. If you are going to be working over lunch, then have the kids pack lunches, or you can pack coolers. Make sure you take pictures of the teens working so you can review with them later. Also, make sure that you either provide water, or the kids bring water. Dehydration can take place when the kids are working this hard.

Week Four: Free Car Wash

Another easy one, and in fact, probably one you've done as a fundraiser previously. Host a volunteer car wash. The key to this one is actually getting the word out that you are doing the event. Prior to the event, you will need some signs that say free car wash (colored markers and poster-board), and make sure that the event makes it into the announcements. You can, if you choose to, put an ad in the local paper as well. Make sure that you stress that it's truly free as a service from the church to the community. Some people will insist that they donate money; that's ok, let them. Take the funds to offset supply costs, or just put it in the offering plate on Sunday and designate it to general funds, or benevolence. Supplies for the event are simple: buckets, towels, soap, hoses, washing mitts or sponges. All of these can be found at your local dollar store, and remember soap goes a long way. Have each kid bring a towel for drying cars. A side note is that you will want to remind your teens to wear appropriate clothing.

Week Five: Care Packages for Police and Fire Stations

This is one of my favorite local missions: hand-delivering care packages to your local police and fire stations. Locating your local stations is easy given the internet. This particular mission is targeted to be timed around the 4th of July. If that doesn't work out for you, no worries, there is no bad time to take care of your local municipalities. I like to include hand-written notes in the care packages from the students about how much they appreciate their service. Please make sure that police notes don't go to firemen and vice versa. You can theme the packages in blue for police and red for firemen as a precaution. Baked goods and candy are some of the best things you can bring because they can be shared amongst a bunch of people. Other things you can include could be water bottles, pre-packaged snacks, or gift cards to your local pizza joint or donut shop.

Week Six: Canned Food Drive for Local Food Kitchen

One week prior to this event, you are going to want to canvas your target neighborhoods with flyers which explain that you are going to be going out on this date collecting canned goods for your local shelter, or food pantry. If your church doesn't have a food pantry, then you can look it up on the internet for your local food kitchen. When you look them up, talk to them about the next week's activity and make sure they are taking donations. Here is another thing you can do: contact your local grocery store(s) to see if they are willing or able to donate any canned goods, dented or not. When you canvas the neighborhoods, try focusing on your teens' neighborhoods. Their own neighbors would be more likely to donate to them since they recognize them. Also, make sure you have enough adults to keep an eye on all the teens. You really don't want to lose sight of your teens. Unless they know the occupant of the house, the teens should not go inside to collect the cans. Also remember to bring plenty of grocery bags or bins to transport the cans.

Week Seven: Volunteer at Local Food Kitchen

Remember last week's mission activity? Hopefully you have already contacted a food bank or soup kitchen and lined up this date to go and volunteer. This is fairly simple. In your discussion with the food bank, make sure you ask about any specific restrictions they have, whether they be age, numbers, forms, etc. If there are forms, then you will need to pick them up ahead of time, make copies, distribute and collect prior to the day of the event. Make sure you have enough parents or chaperones for escorts. I have found that an adult vehicle driver per carload of kid is about the right ratio of chaperones to teens. Usually, it's not a full day of work, only a couple of hours, but it can be extremely impactful for the teens.

Week Eight: Baby Items Drive for Local Pregnancy Center

The object of this mission is to collect donations for mothers who have very little or nothing and find themselves in a tough spot. You will, through your church and community, collect items for a period of time and then deliver them to the local crisis pregnancy center. This will require some coordination with the local center, but also with your home church. I would suggest that you can start this about a month ahead of time, or announce it in week eight and run it for a month. Be sure to get it in the announcements and/or in the newsletter. Have a couple of parents donate several baby playpens or cribs and conveniently locate these in the lobby of your church and/or the hallways. Put signs on them indicating that this is where people can drop off the baby items. On that sign, make sure you mention several of the items which you can accept such as diapers, wipes, food, toys, clothing, etc. After the collection period is over, then schedule a delivery event with your teens. You will need somewhere to store all the stuff you're collecting as well as vans and trucks to transport them. This can be a very powerful event for your teens as they load and unload the donated items. Optional ways to promote the collection: put flyers up around the church; a skit performed by the teens during announcements; have teens stationed at the baskets around the church for times before and after service; put an announcement in the local paper regarding the collection; a video announcement which can be played before church. You might want to call the pregnancy center to determine if there is anything which they cannot or will not accept.

Week Nine: Homeless Care Backpacks

This week's mission is meant to take place over time. This project requires funding, and/or donations. Based on your region, your homeless bags may contain different items. Acquiring the items can be done in several ways. At its simplest, one can take funds from your budget, or church's budget and then take the teens to purchase items at your local discount store. You can also publish a signup list to your congregation so that they can provide different items from the list. Prior to publishing the list, figure out how many bags you plan on stuffing. Getting your congregation involved is almost always beneficial to your youth ministry. As for the items, some things are pretty universal amongst our nation's poorest, while some things are more regional. Have a conversation with your group about what they think would be beneficial, you may be surprised at what they come up with. Here is a list of potential items which you can stock the bags with:

- Socks
- Deodorant (separate guys and girls. We used pink bags for females)
- Feminine products for female backpacks (see above)
- Gloves
- T shirt
- Non-perishable snacks in sealed packages
 - Granola bars
 - Mints
 - Gum
 - Peanuts
 - Hard Candy
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste

- Hairbrush or Comb
- Kleenex packs
- Soap
- Travel shampoo
- Lip balm
- Water Bottles
- \$5 dollar gift cards to local fast food
- Christian tracts, and/or church info

Make it a group activity to pack the bags. You can distribute them in several ways. One, you can keep them in the parents' cars so that whenever they run into a homeless person, they can hand them out spontaneously. Or, you can, as a group, head down to the local shelter, or just drive around looking for them. I prefer the spontaneous method because if you take them directly to a homeless shelter, chances are you might not have enough bags for everyone. The problem with keeping them in parents' cars is that they don't always give them away right away. Of course, if you make a day of it, you may not be able to find homeless people just standing around. Remember to be flexible with this one, as with all plans, they don't always work out the way you want them too.

Week Ten: Community Park / Road Cleanup:

This one is easy; you don't need to make special arrangements, though you should take precautions if you choose to perform the road cleanup. The park cleanup is easy. Make sure you have an ample supply of gloves and trash bags. Arrange to meet the teens at the park, and spread out picking up all the trash they can find. As always make sure you take pictures. If you get ambitious, you can send a press release to your local paper to let them know when and where you will be there so that they have an opportunity to cover it if they so choose. Make sure you instruct your teens to be prepared to answer anyone who asks them what, or why they are doing this. This is a good opportunity to build up goodwill between the church, your youth group, and the community. Make sure you dispose of the trash appropriately, rather than leave it somewhere for someone else to clean up. Your church's dumpster is pretty ideal for that sort of thing. An alternative to the local park is a roadside cleanup. This is inherently more dangerous, so make sure you have adequate adult supervision to make sure the teens don't engage in hazardous behavior during the activity.

Week Eleven: Local Retirement Home Visitation

Warning! This week's activity could result in life-changing events for your teens. It is not normally a simple thing to go visit a retirement home. One cannot simply walk into the neighborhood nursing home and expect to be able to visit with the elderly. This activity requires a bit of planning ahead. Typically, weeks ahead of time, you will need to call the home(s) you wish to visit, explain what you're trying to do, and acquire all the forms and permissions you need to visit. You will need to pick a date which works with their schedules, and fill out whatever waiver forms are required. It is important that during the event, that you don't bring kids who are sick, or fighting off colds to the event. Also because of the restrictions on who can or can't come, it's probably not a good idea to schedule this in lieu of a mid-weeknight service, and you will need to communicate that the teens need to turn in the necessary forms prior to the event. They will not be able to participate if they just show up. However, all the prep work is totally worth seeing the delight in both the elderly, and the teen's faces as they interact with one another. Prepare your teens for a variety of experiences; some of the elderly may be unresponsive, or downright rude and/or mean. This is not a time for retaliation, this is a good time to "shake the dust off your feet" and move on. There will be plenty of friendly people who are eager to meet new people and make new friends. Encourage the teens to ask residents about their lives and their stories. They will be amazed at some of the people and what they've seen in their lives. This is truly an enriching experience which teaches the teens that God loves all of His creations, and that we all deserve love and attention. Most likely, some of your teens will latch on to this and bug you as to when you will be able to do it again. Warning: this could become a new ministry for your youth.

Week Twelve: Spaghetti Fundraiser for Benevolence/Mission Trip Fund

Our final mission activity is a simple fundraiser... well, maybe not that simple. You will need to start planning this event a long time in advance. You will need kitchen help, sound and lighting help, entertainment, volunteers to setup, cleanup, serve tables, etc. Purchase the amount of food based on the number of people in attendance. We chose spaghetti because it can be made en masse, and is a relatively simple menu of spaghetti, sauce (with and without meat), garlic bread, and salad. If your church has a kitchen staff, or people who oversee the kitchen, then you will want to coordinate with them. As for entertainment, a tasteful talent show put on by the teenagers could be the answer for your entertainment needs. You could enlist your praise band (if you have one). They may appreciate the opportunity to give a concert. Other options for entertainment could be a choir concert, the children's choir, a puppet show, or a drama. You could even show a family movie. Whatever you choose, make sure you publish it ahead of time so that everyone knows what they're signing up for. Proceeds from the event should exceed that of the costs. If not, then we're not doing it right. Typically, you can charge \$10 per ticket, or you could even take donations. Either way, you can funnel the profits to a variety of local charities, or straight to your own church's benevolence fund, as long as the proceeds don't go to the youth group, because at this point, the activity ceases to be a mission activity, and simply becomes another fundraiser.

