

Service Project Options

Introduction

Holiness is dead if it remains inside of us. Changed people lead changed lives. After Paul's experience on the Damascus road, people had no doubt that he was different. He was *so* different, in fact, that many people couldn't believe it! That's what holiness is like. The fire of the Spirit consumes us wholly; its intense heat purifies us completely. A true encounter with God will never leave us the same! As the Holy Spirit fills, renews, and transforms us from within, we are called to go out and seek to bring transformation to the churches, the neighborhoods, the cities, and the world in which we live.

Many churches (and youth groups) spend 90% of their time and energy (and money) on worship, productions, and other "inside" events. Very few of the people ever do service outside of the church campus, and even then not very often. A regular area of service such as the events detailed below can add an exciting new dimension and depth to your youth ministry. When service projects are done in conjunction with "fun" trips to youth conventions or amusement parks, often the projects stick out in the students' minds as the most enjoyable and memorable parts of the trip. Each of these service projects is designed to be an integral part of FUEL Week for your youth group. *Consider ways that you can make them a regular, recurring part of your ministry!*

The activities below have been arranged in relative order from little preparation and/or skill required to greater preparation and/or skill required. Read through the entire list before deciding on a project! Something that we have classified as more difficult may seem to be a better fit for your youth group than some of the "easier" options.

Option #1 – WINDSHIELD WASHERS

Divide your group into pairs. Arrange to have enough rolls of paper towels and enough bottles of window cleaner for each pair to have one of each. Go to a shopping center and have the pairs wash the windshields of cars. Prepare some simple little "business cards" for the youth to place under the windshield wipers when they are through. The cards might say something like, "Windshield washed by the youth group at Main Street Community Church, 123 West Main Street. God bless you!" You could also include a scripture reference on the card, perhaps James 2:26 (*For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*). Instruct your youth to feel free to share with the car owners or any curious spectators they may run into, but not to accept any money for their services.

This activity requires very little skill on the part of the youth. It's hard to mess up cleaning someone's windshield, and there's not much to break! If there's a shopping center close to your church, you can just walk there, avoiding the necessity of arranging transportation. You may want to take along some trash bags so the adult youth sponsors can collect the used paper towels. Be sure not to leave any trash behind at the shopping center, and be respectful of mall security or anyone who might not want their windshields washed.

Option #2 – MINISTRY TO THE HOMELESS

Find out if your youth group can do some work at a local homeless shelter or food bank. Many of these organizations have programs where volunteers with a minimal amount of skill can come in to help in the kitchen or sort food.

This activity requires the effort to make the necessary contacts and arrangements beforehand. No special skills on the part of the youth are needed. You will need to arrange enough transportation to get your youth to and from the project site. Be sure to ask the shelter or food pantry about any dress code requirements they may have for volunteers. This activity has great potential to turn into a regular service project that you repeat on the same Saturday (or other day) each month.

If you are unable to make arrangements with any organization, your youth can make sack lunches “assembly-line” style at the church, put an appropriate tract in each one, take them to an area of town where many homeless people hang out, and pass them out. Make sure you have enough adult supervision and are comfortable with the safety of the neighborhood.

Option #3 – GRAFFITI REMOVAL/AREA CLEANUP

Contact your local city hall and ask if they would let your group do some graffiti cleanup. Some cities will even provide the paint and other supplies! This can make a great impact if you are able to do the work in the neighborhood surrounding your church. Make sure that you have enough supplies to keep all the youth busy, and make sure they wear clothes that they won't mind getting stained or dirty. Check out the neighborhood where you will be working beforehand to ensure that conditions are safe for your youth.

This activity requires the effort to make the necessary contacts and arrangements with your city. Sometimes the government can be very slow to respond, and somewhat difficult to work with! The activity also requires more skill on the part of the youth. You need to honestly assess whether you can trust them with paint! If you are able to arrange the work in an area close to your church, you can just walk there, avoiding the necessity of transportation. Be sure not to leave any trash behind from your project!

If the city does not have a graffiti removal program, they may have one for trash cleanup in parks or along city streets. Or, if you know of a needy area, you can furnish your own trash bags, and your group can do some cleanup without any sort of city-sanctioned program (the city will probably not mind having the free help!).

Option #4 – MINISTRY TO THE ELDERLY

Contact a nursing home near your church and ask if there is any way your youth group could serve the residents there. If your group sings, make arrangements to go there and share this gift. Most nursing homes will gladly arrange to have an assembly of the residents, or schedule you to come during their regular activity time. Even if your group doesn't sing, see if you can come and play games with the residents, or just visit with them. The nursing home probably has checkerboards and other table games (if not, you can bring some along), and many of the residents would love the company! Ask your

youth girls to bring fingernail polish or to bring some new hairbrushes, and do the nails and hair of the female residents (clear this with the nursing home administration first).

This activity requires the effort to make the necessary contacts and arrangements with a nursing home. No special skills on the part of the youth are required. If you are able to make arrangements with a nursing home close to your church, you can just walk there, avoiding the necessity of transportation. This activity has great potential to turn into a regular service project that you repeat on the same Saturday (or other day) each month.

Option #5 – SENIOR SAINTS MINISTRY

Obtain from your senior pastor a list of homebound persons from your church. Divide your youth into twos or threes, and have them visit the different persons. You can have groups of guys visit men and groups of girls visit women, but this is not absolutely necessary. Calling a few days ahead of time to let them know you're coming will save you from showing up at a bad time or from making trips to find no one home. Many of your senior saints will love to talk about their lives! You might give the different groups of youth a list of possible questions to ask them, such as how long they've been at the church, what sort of jobs they used to work, questions about their kids and grandchildren, and so forth. If someone has recently been widowed, be sensitive to this. Don't overstay your welcome. Before you depart, ask if you can pray together. Thank them for their hospitality!

This activity requires the effort to make the necessary contacts and arrangements with the senior saints. No special skills on the part of the youth are required. You will need to arrange enough transportation to get the groups to the different homes, although a particular group could visit several homes during the day.

Option #6 – INTER-CHURCH MINISTRY

Ask your pastor if there are any other congregations from your denomination or church group in town that are really struggling. Take an anonymous drive by and look at their facilities. Chances are, they need some serious sprucing up on the outside but lack the funds and/or personnel to get it done. Ask your pastor if he or she would be willing to contact the leadership in that congregation to see about your youth group coming over to do a little work. (Your pastor will probably have an idea about whether this other congregation might be offended by your offer, and may make another suggestion.) Depending on the skills and resources of your youth group, you might pick up trash, mow the lawn, and trim the bushes; you might repair fences, handrails, and benches; or you might apply a fresh coat of paint. Make sure that you have enough work and supplies to keep all the youth busy, and make sure they wear clothes that they won't mind getting stained or dirty. If payment is offered for your services, politely decline it, or else donate it back to the church as an offering.

This activity requires the effort to make the necessary contact with another congregation. It may also require some skills on the part of the youth, depending on the type of work you are going to do. You will need to arrange enough transportation to get your youth to and from the project site. Be sure not to leave any messes behind!

Option #7 – INTRA-CHURCH MINISTRY

Sit down with your pastor or Christian Education leader and see how many of the volunteer jobs your youth could possibly fill on a given Sunday. Basically, you're going to try to give the volunteers at church a day off! With some basic instructions and proper supervision, youth can hand out the donuts and coffee, serve as ushers and greeters, work in the nursery, teach children's Sunday school, and even teach adult Sunday school! If you are *really* ambitious, conduct a full-fledged "youth Sunday" where the youth lead worship and share in the sermon. If you have a leadership team in your youth group, it would be natural for them to take some of the leadership roles in the worship service. Even the adults who "sit in the pews" will be refreshed and blessed as they see the youth giving their lives in service to the Lord. Have the youth group take on as much responsibility as it can, in proportion to the size of your group.

This activity requires a large amount of preplanning, and a high level of commitment from the youth. If some of them promise to do nursery duty and then don't show up, you're stuck! Make sure that you understand thoroughly the proper and legal guidelines for minimum age of nursery workers, male teachers with female students, and so forth. Don't overextend . . . if you can only handle covering the nursery and kids' classes this time, be satisfied with that.

*-Kevin Stiffler
Church of God*