

Some Thoughts on Service...

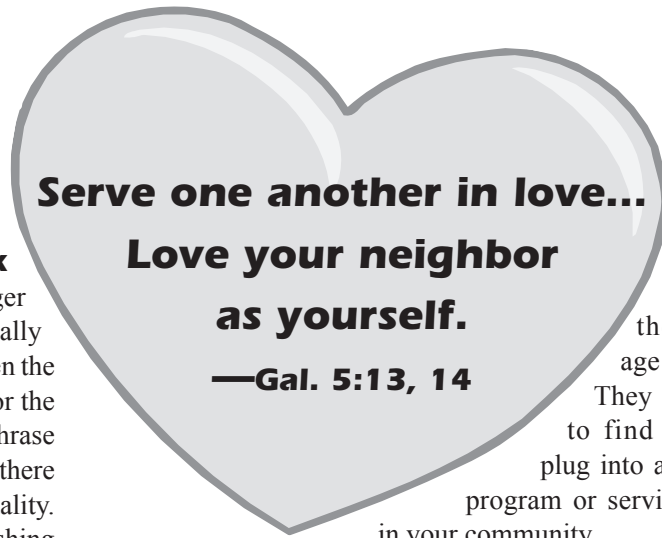
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One of the first questions children ask

as they begin to perceive themselves as a part of a larger circle is, "Can I help?" While it may not be grammatically correct, there is true heart in this question. I think that even the very young intuitively know that there is nourishment for the soul to be found by helping or serving others. I like the phrase "How can I serve" a bit better than "How may I help?" as there is something about the word "help" that implies an inequality. Sometimes when we "help" we may be actually diminishing self-esteem and the "wholeness" of the one we desire to assist. When we serve, we can serve with the wholeness of our beings...then the wholeness of ourselves serves the wholeness of others. It is a relationship between equals. When we serve there is no debt. We are served as the person we are serving. Loving service implies the innate wholeness of others.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve." Children are usually very willing to serve, whether they are very young (K-3rd grade), or late elementary and middle school (grades 4-8). If you are working with the younger children, you might begin by asking them if other members of their family help out in the community and how they do it (volunteering at schools, the hospital, food bank, etc.). You can draw on the child's experience of helping out at home to introduce the idea of helping in their community. If you are working with 4th-8th grade children, then you already know that this age child has abundant energy, curiosity, and a keen interest in what is going on around them.

They want to be challenged as problem solvers, and motivation is consistently high when kids this age design their own service projects. This co-creative process also helps to develop respect for each person involved in the project. You can assist by finding local news stories about people that make a difference in your community. You can encourage them to read a book about a person who stood for a cause or was willing to take a risk on behalf of others. They can "interview" each other about their own skills and talents, and brainstorm ways that people



their own age can help. They may want to find a way to plug into an existing program or service project in your community.

Following are some terms you might want to discuss with your teachers:

- **Community-based Organizations**—Non-profit agencies that serve local populations, often addressing common needs such as social service, health and environmental issues, youth programs, employment and counseling services. These organizations usually offer information and referral services and many rely heavily on volunteers.
- **Community Education**—The collaboration of citizens, schools, agencies and institutions as active partners in addressing education and community concerns; often embraces the concept of lifelong learning.
- **Community Service**—The act of individuals or groups of people providing assistance for the needs identified by residents of communities or local agencies. Providing opportunities for community service enhances the education of students on social issues while helping to develop civic responsibility and raising self esteem.
- **Service Learning**—This is the deliberate inclusion of service activities into the academic curriculum; includes the initiation, study, and reflection of these activities by students during class time. In our city of Port Angeles, WA, high school seniors must have 50 hours of community service to graduate.
- **Volunteerism**—Giving time without monetary or other tangible compensation, to provide assistance to an organization or individual.



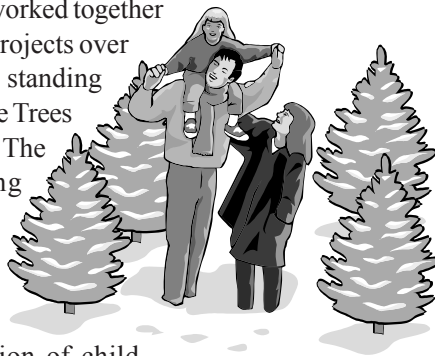
Through community service, young people can succeed independent of athletic ability, popularity or academic skills. Learning how to share tasks is the beginning of team process. It forms a foundation for building common ground among peers. Many young people will find a real talent

for leadership while serving, and have a heightened sense of responsibility to their class or group as well. Serving others develops a deep sense of civic pride, enhances teamwork skills, and increases awareness of diversity in our culture.

Be a Model of What You Preach

I would like to share a personal story about my own family and our commitment to “be in service.” My husband has been very involved in our town over the last 25+ years, including Past President of the YMCA Board, Past President of Healthy Families, Past President of the Exchange Club and last year President of the Chamber of Commerce. We spend a lot of time finding ways to give back to the community we live in. Our three children have grown up with the understanding that you are never too young to make a difference.

We have, as a family, worked together on many community projects over the years, the longest standing being the Festival of the Trees held each November. The monies raised during this 3-day event go to the Hospital Foundation and the National Exchange Club for the prevention of child abuse. Together we have raised (along with many other dedicated volunteers) over half a million dollars in the last 14 years. Our children have spent their Thanksgiving weekends working this since they were very young. Each of them has a vested interest in this event, and I think that choosing to give to our community in this way has contributed to the career choices they have made.



One child has a degree in Human Services, one is interning for the largest non-profit micro-financing company on the West Coast, and the youngest is beginning his college studies in International Relations and Diplomacy. In the context of “church,” I can see in each of them the quality of faith being demonstrated in an active mode. This is an accurate definition of “faith in action.”

Service Questions

I have included some basic questions to jump-start your discussions about service adventures.

For the Younger (K-3rd) Children

- *Everybody has skills. Skills are what you are good at doing. What are your skills?* Are you a fast runner? Good reader or story-teller? List three things you are good at.
- *Everybody has favorite activities. What are yours?* Do you like to play soccer? Draw or color? Sing or horseback ride? Tell us some of your favorite activities.
- *People like to help each other in many different ways. Sometimes we get to do our favorite things when we help others. How have you helped someone at home or school?*
- *How has someone in your neighborhood or school helped you?* So, how can you help others? Do you know you live in a community? A community is a place where people live and work. You can be a helping hand in your community. Can you think of ways you could help out in your school, your church, and the parks in your town? Can you think of other places you might be able to help out?
- *Of all of your ideas, which do you like the best?*



For Grades 4-8

Interests are what people like to do and learn about, like music, geology, sports, animals, etc. Do you like movies, travel? Do you collect anything special? Skills and talents are what you find easy to do and enjoy. Do you like to dance or sing? Are you good at fixing things? Are you a good cook? Can you skateboard, snowboard or ski? Are you a whiz at computers or math? Every person has their own gifts and talents. What are yours?

Interests: I like to think and learn about...

Skills and talents: I can...

Lending a hand: Tell about a time when you were helpful...

Receiving a hand: Tell about a time when someone helped you...

Most of us have heard about organizations like Greenpeace, AmeriCorps or the Peace Corps. Have you ever thought about how someone your age can make a difference? There



are many ways, and some of them close to home right in your community. You can work alone or with some friends...So, how do you begin? *Think about some challenges or problems in*

your community, and in our country. Write them down in two areas: Community Issues & National Issues.

Chances are that there are folks already working on the issues you thought of. They work in groups (often with organizations) or with individuals. Make a short list of *what* the problem is and *who* is already helping, along with what you think they are doing to help. Now, take a few minutes to think about ways that *you* can help too. Visit with your parents and friends to get ideas.

You can make a difference!

Steps Along the Way

So, you want to help out? Terrific!

Here are a few steps to help you accomplish this task.

- Project name
- Purpose (Why are you doing this?)
- Outcome (What will be the result of this project?)
- Participants
 - Who will provide service?
 - Who will receive service?
 - Who else can help? Your friends, your family?
- Tasks to be done
- Supplies (if any) and how will you get them?
- How will you know when you are done?

After-service evaluation:

- Describe what you did and what you liked the best. Was there anything you did not like?
- What would make this project better the next time?
- How did you feel when you were being in service to others? What did you learn from this project?

Tips for parent involvement:

- Inform the parents of the community service plans.
- Talk about caring, and what this means. Have the children ask their parent what they care about in your community.
- Have the children ask, "How have members of your extended family helped others?"
- Recognize the children's accomplishments through service. Invite the parents to some type of ceremony to celebrate tasks accomplished or hours given in service.

Service Opportunities for Young People

- Service to address hunger, poverty and homelessness
- Service related to the environment
- Service with the elderly
- Service addressing multiculturalism
- Service with children (cross-age mentoring)
- Service with people in crisis (care packages for shelters, etc.)
- Service with peers
- Service to address violence (peer mediation)
- Service to people with disabling conditions
- Service to promote community quality (paint over graffiti, etc.)
- Service within the congregation

Recommended reading

Taking Asset Building Personally: An Action & Reflection Workbook, Jolene L. Roehlkepartain, Search Institute, 1999.
Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn, Peter L. Benson, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Abingdon Press, 1993.
101 Simple Service Projects Kids Can Do, Susan L. Lingo, Standard Publishing Co., 2000.