

Practical Ministry Skills: Planning a Group Service Project



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PLANNING A GROUP SERVICE PROJECT



How to Use This Resource

Take a quick peek here to maximize the content in this training download.

By Sam O’Neal

Apathy and staleness are the great enemies of small-group health. A group can be going along well for several months—learning, praying, fellowshiping, even worshipping—but the people continually keep their focus inward, on themselves, these great enemies are certain to rear their ugly heads.

That’s why service is such a vital piece of small-group life. Group members who are serving other people do not turn inward or become apathetic. Groups who are serving others do not become stale.

Target Audience

This download has been designed primarily to help individual small groups plan a service project. The articles are practical in nature and designed to provide step-by-step process and usable ideas. Therefore, most of the material is written for individual small-group leaders.

There are a few content items that would be helpful to pastors, small-group directors, or service coordinators within a church staff. These include “Inspiring Your Groups to Serve,” by Eddie Mosley, and “Creating an Outward Culture for Your Ministry,” by Alan Danielson.

Casting a Vision

People rarely develop a desire to serve on their own—just like service projects rarely come together without a great deal of planning and preparation. So, before you start presenting a bunch of ideas to your people and encouraging them to serve, you’ll need to make sure they have caught the vision for service.

This download features three articles to help you accomplish this task. Rick Howerton’s “The Benefits of Serving as a Small Group” will help individual leaders cast the vision to the people in their group. “Inspiring Your Groups to Serve” and “Creating an Outward Culture for Your Ministry” will help pastors and staff members cast a vision for service to the entire church, as mentioned above.

Taking Action

Once you have people ready and willing to serve—whether the whole church or an individual group—there are steps that need to be taken in order to pull off a successful event. These steps are not revolutionary, but neither are they common knowledge to many. The articles in this section will help you make sure all the bases are covered.

Pay special attention to “Appointing a Service Coordinator,” by Heather Zempel. This is a great way to get other group members more involved in leadership, and to ensure that group leaders don’t pile too much on their own plates. Also, “The Logistics of Planning a Group Service Project,” by Mark Ingmire, is a good step-by-step guide that can keep you from forgetting anything important.

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The Benefits of Serving as a Small Group

Plus an overview of the steps it takes to get something done.

By Rick Howerton

Doing service projects together as a small group is an effective and necessary element of building Christian community. Yes, getting people to have a passion for service projects can be a challenge. Yes, these missional experiences demand careful planning, time consuming preparations, and a serious commitment from small-group leaders and members.

But the rewards are many! Here are just a few:

- **Service brings God’s rewards.** Jesus said: “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:3–4).
- **Service levels the playing field.** In order for a group to be healthy, all caste systems must be set aside. Service projects are a super way to instill this principle into an active reality as the bank president paints the same wall as the garbage collector, or the working mom serves food to the homeless alongside the wealthy socialite.
- **Service allows group members to realize and exercise their spiritual gifts and abilities.** This is especially true for those persons whose gifts and abilities are not noted or needed in most small-group situations (i.e. carpentry, plumbing, and so on).
- **Service creates an opportunity for group members to affirm one another.**
- **Apprentices will have an opportunity to establish themselves as leaders.** Asking an apprentice to spearhead a service project is a super way to establish him or her as a leader.
- **Service makes Jesus famous.** As groups go into the community as the representation of Jesus and tell those they are serving about Him Jesus’ name gains respect.
- **The church’s reputation is enhanced.** As a group goes out, the church they are from becomes known in the community as a church that cares about the people in that particular town or city even more than they care about themselves.
- **Service produces spiritual growth.** Guiding group members into all aspects of the growth journey is vital in taking someone from a spiritual baby to a mature believer. Caring for the needs of the less fortunate is an important part of the process.
- **Service turns a “group” into a “community.”** In order for there to be community, people must have common stories from shared past experiences. Stories that evoke laughter, tears, and a sense of pride flow freely after a group has been on mission together.

Service Options

Even with all of these benefits, group leaders will still need to keep practical concerns in mind as they begin casting a vision for group service projects. Because of group members’ busy schedules, it’s important that your group have a lot of freedom concerning when they will be on mission together.

Here are a few options that churches currently use:

1. Some churches have a 2:1:1 approach. This means two Bible studies a month, one fellowship experience a month, and one service project per month. These can happen any time during the week, but most often each event happens during the small-group meeting time.
2. Service projects happen regularly on Saturdays, but the week of the project there is no small-group meeting.

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3. A couple of small groups partner to do a service project, which cuts the number of people necessary to plan and prepare for the event.
4. The service project happens during the small-group meeting time, and projects are only chosen that can be accomplished during the amount of time that the small group would have been meeting already.

Service Steps

When a small-group leader commits to leading his or her group to do a service project, I suggest the following steps:

1. Under the direction of the group leader, the group determines what the project will be.
2. Ask the apprentice or someone with the spiritual gift of administration to oversee the project. They will be the contact person working with the organization or person being served, determine what materials are needed to accomplish the work and acquire them, assign tasks that need to be accomplished prior to the day of the project, and make sure all work is completed. .
3. Lead the group to pray that God will make it possible to share Jesus' story with the person(s) being helped.
4. During the small-group meeting before the service project, have the person overseeing the project make sure everyone knows what they need to bring and what time to arrive at the agreed upon location.
5. E-mail the information mentioned in step 4 to the group members two days before the project.
6. Do the project.
7. At the next meeting, celebrate what God has done through the group.

— RICK HOWERTON is author of [Destination: Community](#) and a Q & A panelist for SmallGroups.com. Copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today Interantional.

Discuss:

1. What has been your favorite experience with serving others? What made it memorable?
2. Which of the rewards mentioned above is most exciting to you?
3. Which of the rewards will be most exciting to the rest of your group? Why?



Inspiring Your Groups to Serve

Several steps we learned from our journey into service.

By Eddie Mosley

Before we get into a lot of practical points, let me start with a bit of our story when it comes to service and small groups. At LifePoint Church, where I serve as a pastor, the GroupLife Division is guided by the principles in Acts 2:42. This has helped us develop our three objectives: Discipleship, Community, and Service. These three objectives are discussed each quarter in our small-group leader luncheons, and obviously discipleship and community are fairly easy for our small groups to swallow. But we've discovered that it's a lot tougher to get groups talking about the objective of service.

Then we encountered a book that was circulating among the Nashville Network of Small-Group Pastors: *Externally Focused Church*, by Rick Rusaw. While the challenging stories from Rick were inspiring, I thought that getting our group leaders to buy in to the vision just by reading the book would not work. So we invited Rick to be a guest speaker at one of our annual development events. He shared story after story on how his church started with a few easy service projects and watched God grow the relationships within the community. He ended the day sharing the current level of relationships and involvement his church has with city officials.

This became a challenge and a vision for our small groups. We were determined to discover a plan, a strategy, and a process to help our church become involved in the community. This quote from Rusaw really caught our attention: "If your church vanished, would your community weep? Would they even notice?" That became our goal.

We knew our LifePoint small groups were already involved in the community because they met in homes around the city. Our group members were naturally aware of what was happening in their neighborhoods, schools, and cities—they lived there. So we faced this question: How do we raise the level of involvement, ministry, and leadership in our neighborhoods and communities?

Here are some of the answers we have been working through:

Discover Needs

Some of our small groups were able to discover opportunities on their own, but one event helped start the ball rolling when it came to identifying community needs. The Middle School Ministry of LifePoint Church led an annual weekend service event called "Arms Around the City." With a little work and a lot of coordination, this ministry was able to arrange four projects with schools, local organizations, and city parks and recreation.

Then our adult small groups were asked to help. As they served, our groups discovered more opportunities to minister to these communities in an ongoing way throughout the year. Other groups decided to sign up each year for the annual event. We now celebrate these stories at each of our quarterly Group Luncheons. We enlist three to four group leaders to share about their projects and the difference this service is making in their group.

Share Service Opportunities with All Groups

You never know when opportunities will fall in your lap; you never know what can happen. So if you learn about an opportunity to serve, don't pass it along to only one group or a handful of groups. Tell everyone.

For example, a motivational letter writing assignment by a 7th grade class in a local middle school turned into a church-wide service project for us. LifePoint Church was one of the first places many students mailed their motivational letters—each asking for money to purchase a pig for a family in Africa. At first, the church was going to send a check from our benevolence budget and be done with it. But after a short discussion, we decided to copy a few of the student's letters and send them to each of our small groups.

All of a sudden, there was a lot of buzz throughout the church about "The Pig Letter." LifePoint small groups purchased more than just a pig; they purchased several animals for the class. It ended with a partnership between the school and church with a church staff member being invited to speak to 7th graders.

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Seek Out a Leader

When people and groups begin to serve, excitement will develop in your church as more groups learn about opportunities, serve, and share their stories. It's important that you seek out a leader to discover service opportunities: a Service Director. This should be a person who is involved and passionate about the community—someone who can define and organize a need into manageable pieces and communicate the heart of the need.

And that last bit is important. The ability of our Service Director to communicate the heart rather than just announce the need has encouraged our small groups to become passionate about the people we are serving, not just meeting the need.

Offer Options Around Passions

At LifePoint, a passion for baseball (of all things) combined with a person who had MLB experience led to a ministry called Fielder's Choice. This is a sports ministry that serves the community and churches nationally and internationally. It helps them connect with the community by leading coach's and kid's clinics, as well as chapel services each year.

Another area that our sending culture is growing is through the re-establishment of the concept of "neighborhood." Often, people are so mobile that many group members in homes don't even know their neighbors. We've found that helping people throw Matthew Parties (Luke 5:29) is one of the foundational practices that help people catch the "sending church culture" (Galatians 5:14). Also, we've started several subdivision small groups with Easter Egg Hunts or July 4th fireworks shows.

These events help group members get to know their neighbors by prayerfully approaching them as opportunities to discover needs. So spend time discovering the passions, hobbies, and opportunities of the people in your group. Challenge them to use their passion to serve others.

Take It Global

Finally, "mission experiences" are a wonderful way for a small group to live out the sending culture. Your church can encourage this by offering mission opportunities that allow for different gifts and talents. These do not have to be international, but they do need to offer a challenge that can be accomplished only through a group. When people serve together, God moves in their lives and the team to allow for an experience that cannot be matched any other way.

At LifePoint, the result of practicing the steps above looks something like this:

1. Each of our groups is regularly challenged to lead a service project—whether from a passion of one member, from a need that is presented in the neighborhood, or from the Service Director.
2. Each week someone at our church is talking, blogging, and sending photos that tell the story of a recent service project. These stories drive the movement for more people to be involved.
3. At the Small-Group Leaders Luncheons or development events, time is given to discuss service projects or mission experiences, as well as what groups are accomplishing.
4. The Service Director is also given time to share the stories and the needs that have been discovered.

The challenge that God has given to love our neighbor as ourselves can be the start of your small groups living out a sending culture. Keep the stories of groups serving alive. Tell them often. Invite others to go with you on the journey of serving.

— EDDIE MOSLEY is Executive Director of GroupLife at LifePoint Church in Smyrna, TN. Copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. Would your community care if our church was suddenly gone? What about your small group?
2. Does your church need a Service Director? Why or why not?
3. What concrete step can you take to help your church and small groups begin impacting your community through service?



Creating an Outward Culture for Your Ministry

Practical advice for turning around your small-groups battleship.
Matthew 28:19–20

Have you ever seen a Hollywood stunt man spin a sports car around 180 degrees—maybe even sliding it gracefully into a narrow parking spot on a crowded street? They make it look so easy, don't they? As I've worked with small-groups ministries, I've often wished that I could operate like one of those drivers. Wouldn't it be nice if I could turn the whole ministry on a dime from an inward focus to an outward one?

In reality, I've found that trying to change the culture of an entire small-groups ministry—and by extension, the culture of the church it serves—is more like turning around a full-blown battleship. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of energy and resources. And it takes a lot of space. But the great news is this: it can be done!

Those of us who coach and direct small groups often point to Jesus' words in the Great Commission—"Go and make disciples"—and hope that our groups will heed them. We pray that leaders and members will get off their couches and move out into the community with a strong passion for changing the world. And a few groups (usually no more than 10 percent) do take up the call. But the rest stay on the couch—praying, eating snacks, and reading the Bible in comfortable isolation.

I find this frustrating, to put it mildly. Groups don't readily adopt an outward focus for two reasons. First, inwardness is central to human nature. Human beings are self centered—even human beings who are committed to being a part of a weekly small group. Second, groups are not outward because churches don't *effectively* lead them to be outward. Here's the hard truth: the frustration we as coaches and pastors feel about our groups' inwardness is, at least in part, our own fault.

To change the direction of a small-groups ministry from inward to outward, everything will rise and fall on a church's leadership. The *power* to change the direction comes from God, but *responsibility* is ours. Remember, "He who thinks he leads while no one follows merely takes a walk."

So how do we lead this change? How do we turn the battleship around? The following three principles are vital to that process. When small groups aren't focused outward on their communities, it is because the leaders of that ministry have neglected one or more of these three things.

Outwardness Must Be in Your Heart

Do you wake up every morning thinking about reaching people for Christ? Are people's souls as precious to you as they are to Jesus? When you drive to work, are you dreaming up ways to reach the hundreds of people in the cars around you, or are you muttering curses about their driving habits?

If you as a coach or pastor don't eat, sleep, and breath outwardness, your small groups won't, either. It's a simple fact that we simply cannot take people to where we have never been! In other words, we need to be smoking what we're selling. So pray that God will develop in you the same passion for souls that you want to see in your group leaders and members.

Outwardness Must Be on Your Lips

In order to lead your groups to become outward, you must talk about outwardness all the time. Things like discipleship, ministry, worship, fellowship, Bible study, and fun are all important elements of small-groups ministry. But each of these require very little encouragement on the part of leadership. Each of these in some way meets the needs of the people in a group—and so by default they turn inward.

But outwardness is not something that people embrace naturally. They have to be reminded of it time and time and time again. It's like parenting my four-year-old son. I constantly have to verbally remind him about the "outward" things that he should do—sharing, playing nice, and being polite. These are selfless acts that he must be taught and then continually reminded of.

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Here's a good principle to remember when keeping outwardness on your lips: embrace imbalance. Put simply, you can't talk about outwardness too much. The bottom line is that people can't come to Christ once their life on Earth is over, so it is up to us as leaders of a ministry to ensure that we are doing everything possible to lead that ministry toward outwardness.

So talk about outwardness more than you talk about anything else. Make it the subject of your newsletters, your training materials, your meeting notes, your conversations, your websites, your podcasts, and any other form of communication you use. When you are sick to death of talking about outwardness, you're probably just starting to make a dent, so keep it up!

One effective method is to cast a vision by telling stories of lives that were changed by the outward actions of your small groups. Brag about those groups who have embraced outwardness. Make sure to talk all the time about the behaviors you want your groups to embody.

Outwardness Must Be in Your Strategy

This is where the leaders of many small-groups ministries fall short. It's not enough to love outwardness and to talk about it until you're blue in the face. You must also plan and prepare for it. Of course, every ministry situation is unique, so let me just share some of the outwardness strategies we use at LifeChurch.tv.

First, we made an intentional decision about our use of vocabulary. One of our church's core values is evangelism, and the primary method that our groups use to live out that core value is missions. So in our small-group culture, we made the words *evangelism* and *missions* synonymous. We don't think of missions as something that takes place in Africa and evangelism as something that takes place in my neighborhood—the two are one. Missions are happening when we paint a group home for mothers who are victims of domestic abuse, when we package food for hungry families, when we serve at a camp for chronically ill children, and when we mow a neighbor's lawn. Mission opportunities are all around us, and they open doors for conversations that lead people to Christ.

Second, we flipped our mission focus from big to small. Many churches think of "missions" in terms of long distance trips that take a lot of time and money. Therefore, average churchgoers assume that missions are only for the super committed and ultra spiritual. They think that missions are big commitment, big cost, and for big believers only. Sadly, they've been deceived.

At LifeChurch.tv, we made the conscious decision to combat this lie by making missions something accessible to everyone. How? By focusing on small mission efforts on a massive scale. We have local MicroMissions that last for less than a day. Sometimes our MicroMissions take as few as 20 people. Sometimes they take as many as 200. Imagine 200 of your group members outside of their walls and making a difference! We also produce LifePacks, which are simply large plastic bags with a list of items inside. People take the bags, fill them with the items listed, and return them to the church. Last Christmas our people provided gifts for every Department of Human Services child in the state of Oklahoma—just by filling LifePacks.

We still provide international and overnight MicroMission opportunities, but our focus has shifted to smaller, entry-level type experiences, and the results have been overwhelming. One story in particular reflects the power of this approach. Several of our small groups began to work with a local home for people trying to overcome addictions. A resident named Cory was moved by our members' genuine care and eventually began attending one of the groups. Not long after, Cory became follower of Jesus. Today, Cory leads his own small group, which ministers to drug-addicted people. An outward group reached Cory, and now he leads an outward group! It just doesn't get any better than that.

Our strategy continues to evolve to this day, but time and intentionality are turning the battleship for us. I know that, Lord willing, the same can happen with your groups.

— ALAN DANIELSON; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. What are some ways to keep outreach on the hearts of our ministry leaders?
2. In what areas do we talk about outwardness now? What steps can we take to talk about outwardness more than anything else?
3. Which of these strategies could work in our ministry? What new strategies can we develop to provide evangelism and missions opportunities for our groups?

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Take the Next Step

An overview of small-group service projects.

By Keri Wyatt Kent

Just before dawn on Saturday morning, a few neighbors gather in my driveway bearing dozens of eggs, gallons of orange juice, fruit, bagels, and cheese. We drive to a women's shelter in the city, then cook and serve breakfast to the 30 or so women who live there. Two hours later, we head back to the suburbs in time to get our kids to their various activities. It's the perfect service project for a group of busy suburban moms.

Several of these women are in my small group (a neighborhood Bible study), but some are just friends of people in the group. We welcome anyone from the neighborhood who wants to go with us. We've been doing this for more than two years. At least ten different women have gone with us, usually three or four at a time—which we've discovered is optimal in the shelter's kitchen. Some people go nearly every month, others just go once in a while. It's been a way for our group to rally around a cause, to share an adventure, and to begin living out the biblical love and compassion we've been studying.

Doing service projects together builds camaraderie within the group. In a way, service projects are the "lab" to small group's "lecture." If you are studying the Bible, they allow you to live out what you are learning. They provide some space to show the love and compassion of God to those in need.

The Bible says that faith without works is dead. And it has plenty to say about the poor. For example, Proverbs 22:9 says: "The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor." And Proverbs 19:17 says, "Those who are kind to the poor lend to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done."

Serving those in need is part of what it means to be a Christian. Performing that service together with your small group can be a life-changing experience—if you approach it the right way. Here are some tips for adding this important element to your group life.

Start With Prayer

Henry Blackaby famously observed that prayer is noticing where God is at work, and then joining him in that work. This is precisely the kind of listening prayer that must precede any small-group service project. Where is there a need? What are group members passionate about? Where is there, perhaps, an organization that is working to meet that need and could use a little help? Where is God calling your group to serve? What passions has he placed on the group members' hearts? Are there some needs right in your own neighborhood?

Pray together as a group, and ask God to lead you. Hashing it out is part of listening to God in community. Listen to each other as you listen to God.

For example, our group serves breakfast at a women's shelter run by Breakthrough Urban Ministries (www.breakthroughministries.com). There is a huge need in the part of Chicago where this ministry works. Before we started doing our monthly breakfasts, I already knew of Breakthrough and their work. They have a system in place where volunteers come in to serve meals. They were looking for a group to take one meal a month (ours is always breakfast on the second Saturday). And our group members had a passion for the homeless, and for domestic violence victims. This was a great fit.

Start Slowly

Give the group time to process the idea of doing a serving project, and make sure everyone has input. You may want to start by selecting a one-time project. Check with your church or another local charity to research possibilities. Our church, for example, packs meals once a year to send to Africa through an organization called Feed My Starving Children. Our church also runs a food pantry where they need volunteers on a regular basis. Going once to a soup kitchen, Habitat for Humanity build, or some other one-time project can be a good way to start.

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Our group first went to the shelter to serve a meal during the holidays. A year later, we went again, and after that, we decided we wanted to go on a regular basis.

Designate a Point Person

As you pray about where to serve, you may notice that some people in the group have a lot of passion about serving, or about a particular need. Ask one of them to be the organizer of your service project. In our group that person is me, but I have another woman who will organize things if I happen to be out of town. In our case, that person confirms with the shelter that we will be there, coordinates who's coming and what each will bring, and figures out transportation.

Go With Humility

Your group should expect not only to serve, but to learn. Remind them to be open, to notice how helping others can minister to them. Our group has learned so much from the women at the shelter. Often they are escaping abusive situations, and despite their trials, they are women of great faith.

Every person you meet matters to God, and they have something to teach you, if you are open and humble. Treat them with respect. See the value of the people you're serving—and expect God to speak to you through them.

Serve Regularly

While one-time projects can be great, real life-change happens when you serve consistently. Not everyone in the group may be able to make it to a one-time project. If you do something monthly or quarterly, more group members will have opportunities to serve. Perhaps you want to adopt a school in a needy area and volunteer to tutor there on a regular basis, or help out at a food pantry once a month.

Understand the Purpose

Serving others, whether through a one-time project or on-going involvement, is not a way to earn points with God. Rather, it is a way to open ourselves and allow God to form us. It is obedience to Scripture. By serving others, we allow God to develop our compassion. Serving helps others, but also forms us spiritually. By imitating Christ, who came to serve, we grow in Christ-likeness. It is not about impressing God, or others.

Talk about these ideas with your group. You may want to discuss some of the countless verses in the Bible that talk about the poor. (Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25 are great passages to start with.)

Be Flexible

We serve in a pretty rough neighborhood in the city. Some of our suburban group members simply don't want to go. That's okay. For those who go, it's an act of faith—we trust that God will protect us on our "urban adventures." The group members know they are always invited to the service project, but we don't force it. Sometimes I look for another way to include them, such as asking them to donate food. Ask group members to suggest projects they have a passion for—you'll see participation increase.

Invite Others

I have found that non-Christians are often more open to doing a service project than they are to coming to church or small group. Inviting non-group members to come along on a service project can often be a first step toward inviting them into the group itself. One of my neighbors, who was not yet a Christian, was always glad to come to the shelter. She was very comfortable talking to the women there, unlike some of the others from our group, who preferred to stay in the kitchen rather than come out and interact with the guests in the dining room.

I noticed, out loud, how loving and accepting she was. I affirmed her for what she was doing. She heard the women who lived in the shelter talking about their faith. She saw their struggles. Her heart was moved with compassion. She's now in our Bible study, earnestly seeking God, reading the Bible for the first time in her life. For her, the service project was an "on-ramp" into the group.

Take Time to Debrief

Ask group members to talk about what they're learning from serving. Are they feeling guilt or gratitude for their own privilege? Let them process. Then, push them to go deeper. How does their affluence isolate them, for example? How do the poor have to trust God more than the well-off? Allow the group to wrestle with the feelings and questions that come up.

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Service projects, especially ongoing ones, will help your group bond, and help individual members to grow in their faith. Perhaps this is the next step your group needs to take.

— KERI WYATT KENT is a small-group leader, speaker, and the author of seven books, including *Simple Compassion* (Zondervan). Learn more at www.keriyattkent.com. Copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. What was my most recent experience with someone who could be considered “poor”?
2. When would be a good time for our group to pray about serving together? What steps can I take to make that happen?
3. Who are some people outside of our group that might like to join us in a service project?



Appointing a Service Coordinator

How to help your group grow and disciple a member at the same time.

By Heather Zempel

If you've been reading the articles in this resource, you're probably feeling like service really is an important part of your small group. Maybe you're even groaning inside now because you feel like you have to add one more thing to your plate.

Don't do it. While we all should live our lives in service to others—and your life will serve as the model to your group—you should not necessarily be the primary person driving the service engine in your small group. Instead, consider appointing a Service Coordinator for your group.

Leading a small group requires a lot of juggling: lesson planning, house cleaning, attendance tracking, cookie baking, and so on. A mentor once told me, "A good leader can do it all. A great leader doesn't do much at all." It's the power of delegation. Everyone in your group should be contributing in some way, and it's your job as the leader to make that happen. It's not just about distributing responsibilities so you don't have to do as much. It's about discipleship. When you delegate roles and responsibilities in a way that gives people opportunities to grow their gifts, you are discipling them. As Paul encouraged the church at Rome, "if their gift is serving, let them serve."

So, appointing a service coordinator is *practical* leadership. And it's *biblical* discipleship. Here are some tips:

Look for Gifts

Appointing a service coordinator begins by looking at the spiritual gifts and passions of the people in your group. People with gifts of mercy, hospitality, service, evangelism, and administration typically make good service coordinators. A mercy-oriented coordinator will approach service differently from an evangelism coordinator, but the end result is a greater focus on service within your group.

Look for Compatibility

Look for someone that you can work with and who understands your vision for the group. Some folks may come in with their own agenda and desire to completely change the direction for your group. Most service-oriented folks are zealous about their work, and they may want to re-route your entire group to the slums of India. Make sure they understand how you would like to see service incorporated into the fabric of your group.

Start as an Experiment

Start small by asking someone to serve as the service coordinator for one semester. Or one project. At National Community Church, one of our core values is "everything is an experiment." Establishing a short timeframe will give you the opportunity to determine if your service coordinator is a good fit, and it will give them an exit point so they don't feel like they are committing to something in perpetuity.

Give Them Projects

Don't just give them a title. Give them direction. Start small. Inform them that you want to get your group involved in a project like the [Thanksgiving Lunch](#), [Angel Tree](#), or [Load the Bus](#), and let them know that you would like for them to spearhead it and organize it. Talk specifically about your expectations for service within the group—how many service projects will the group participate in over the course of the semester? What types of projects will be done? Eventually, you will be able to let them dream up their own projects, but give them specific directions in the early stages.

Give Them a Platform

Giving a platform begins with public affirmation and validation from you. Give the service coordinator opportunities to cast a vision for service and give details on upcoming opportunities. That may mean giving

PLANNING A GROUP SERVICE PROJECT

them time each week during your group announcements. Or it may mean giving them posting privileges on your group blog to get the word out. Give them the opportunity to lead the group discussion one night and focus on the topic of service. A title with no platform will bear little results.

Coach Them

Take your service coordinator under wing and invest extra time, pastoral care, and discipling into them. View them as part of your leadership team and include them in the planning process for your group. Give them feedback on how they cast vision, organize projects, and mobilize the group around service. Equip them by through books and resources, or by sending them links to good web articles that pertain to service in small groups.

Empower Them

Empowering goes beyond giving a platform. As your service coordinator grows and their gifts mature, you should let them loose to dream, plan, and activate your group to service. Your service coordinator should be someone who challenges you personally and stretches you in uncomfortable ways. Communicate to them the importance of the role they play within your group, and encourage them to continue to fulfill their role in the body of Christ.

Appointing a service coordinator will help you focus on your gifts while giving someone else an opportunity to grow in their gifts. “Every member a minister” should be one of the slogans for your group, and the Body of Christ will grow and learn from one another as a result.

— HEATHER ZEMPEL is Pastor of Discipleship at National Community Church in Washington, D.C., copyright © 2009. Used with permission of National Community Church.



How Do We Choose Where to Serve?

Helpful hints for what can be a surprisingly tough decision.

By Sam O'Neal

So, it's time for your group to serve. You've spent time casting the vision for service, and your group members have caught the fire. They are ready and willing to spend their time and resources to bless others in your community. Everything is going well.

But the next big question might be a little tougher than you think: How will your group choose where and when to serve?

Making this choice can turn into a prickly situation for a variety of reasons. Once group members become aware of the needs in your community, they are likely to form their own opinions about which needs are most important and deserving of their effort. This often results in group members having different ideas about which project the group should tackle first—which means that choosing one person's idea will also be rejecting the ideas of others. And since your group members are human beings, this can result in feelings of confusion or resentment, even bitterness.

These feelings can become magnified if group members have a personal connection to a particular service project. For example, consider a group member with a sister who is a single mom in need of babysitting help and home repairs. If that member requests that the group serve this woman, other members may feel strong-armed into helping because of a desire not to offend the group member in question. If the group decides to serve elsewhere, there is a real possibility the group member will be wounded.

So, how should a small group decide where and when to serve? There are really only two options.

One Person Decides

First, one person can make the decision. If the group has selected a Service Coordinator, he or she would make the choice. Otherwise, the group leader would decide.

The main benefit of having one person make the decision is that you avoid most of the drama and hurt feelings that sometimes arise when groups face this decision. If anyone is offended or hurt by the decision, he or she can sit down with the person who made the choice and have their questions answered. It can also save the group a lot of time spent in discussion about projects that really aren't practical or feasible.

The main downside to this approach is that it can stall much of the momentum and enthusiasm the group feels for service. In other words, if the group leader has spent a lot of energy getting the group excited about service, that excitement can dissipate if the group isn't interested in the project chosen by the leader. This can be especially damaging if the leader makes a poor choice and the group has a bad experience with service right off the bat.

One other option that fits this category is for an outside church leader to determine which service projects a small group participates in. This often happens if a church has a staff person overseeing outreach and community service for the entire congregation.

The Whole Group Decides

The only other way to go about making this decision is the democratic process—have group members vote on the projects they want to tackle, with the understanding that the group will move forward with whatever project garners the most votes.

The main benefit of this method is that it maintains the excitement of the group as a whole. The project chosen is guaranteed to be the one the whole group is most excited about—whether or not it is actually a good choice for the group.

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And that highlights the main downside of this method: the group may make a poor choice. The majority of people might choose something that is too expensive or too difficult or too comfortable without fully understanding the decision being made. As a group leader or service coordinator, you must be willing and able to let go if you follow this option.

The other downside of this method is that individual group members may be offended or hurt by the group's choice, as mentioned above. If this happened, they probably won't feel comfortable bringing up their complaint in front of the entire group, and thus will allow it to remain buried and festering inside.

My Take

For what it's worth, here is the method I use when it is time for my group to make a big decision, including what service projects to participate in.

First, have group members brainstorm all of the possible service projects they are interested in (this works best if you write all of the answers on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper). Once you've got a large list, instruct group members to select their three favorite options from that larger list. As people identify their three favorites, put a check-mark next to each one on the board.

Once this stage is complete, you should be able to eliminate several of the least popular projects. The goal here is to get the list under 10, so you'll say something like, "Let's erase all the projects that don't have any check marks," or, "Let's erase all the projects that have fewer than two check marks." When you have your revised list of less than 10 possible service projects, ask the group to vote on each project, with each person having only one vote. The project that receives the most votes is the winner.

One last suggestion: keep a list of the projects that didn't win, but still received several votes. Since these projects have at least some interest from the group, it's a good idea to hold on to them for the next time your group is deciding when and where to serve.

— SAM O'NEAL; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever been part of a committee or group that had a tough time making decisions? What were the main obstacles?
2. Have you ever been part of a committee or group that was great at making decisions? What made the process work?
3. What steps will you need to take to help your group choose its next service project?



The Logistics of Planning a Group Service Project

Here's what it takes to make things happen.

By Mark Ingmire

Recently our church asked our small-group leaders to evaluate our small-group ministry. One key finding that surprised us was that our leaders desired more outreach opportunities to serve our local community.

To address this desire of our groups to serve others, we have intentionally used two ways to help our congregation find service opportunities. We reach out using both centralized and decentralized strategies. Our centralized strategy is called “Towel and Basin Day,” and it is organized so that the entire church can participate, including our small groups.

Centralized Strategy

Organizing an event like “Towel and Basin Day” is simple, but requires time and attention to detail well ahead of the event. Planning can be broken down into simple steps:

- **Step One:** Select a point person to organize the Towel and Basin Day. This could be a staff member or volunteer. The point person should be someone who is passionate about serving the community and is able to recruit volunteers to help in the planning and implementation of the event.
- **Step Two:** Create a list of local missions the church supports, as well as local parachurch and non-profit organizations that serve the poor or disabled. This list could be created by the point person alone or with a group of people. From the list of ministries and organizations, select the ministries you think you might be able to help. Next, select a date that your groups will plan to go out together and serve your community.
- **Step Three:** Contact the selected ministries and organizations to let them know you are planning a day when your small groups are willing to serve. On Towel and Basin Day, be sure you send people to the local ministries you contacted. We learned the hard way that if you say people are coming and nobody goes, the ministry could be offended. They, too, have made preparations for your small group to come and serve.
- **Step Four:** Set the date your small groups will reach out into the community. Our Towel and Basin Days are held on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. so that most of our groups can participate. We've found that six hours allows a significant amount of time to complete the service project.
- **Step Five:** Pay attention to the details by asking what supplies will be needed. For example, if one of the service projects is raking leaves, then extra rakes may need to be borrowed. Consider providing water and snacks for the participants. If the groups will be out all day, then a decision about what to do for lunch will need to be made.
- **Step Six:** Cast the vision to your congregation and small groups about the impact you dream of making by reaching out in practical ways to your community.
- **Step Seven:** Ask your small groups to sign up for the service project that suits them the best. To make sure they are prepared, create a list of supplies the groups will need to bring to complete their service project.

Centralized Advantages

- Your congregation will have greater visibility in your community. Our church is the largest congregation in our community, but not everyone in our community has heard of us. Doing an event like this can help get the word out to the community about your church.

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- This kind of event allows the church to pool its resources, both financial and man power, in order to make a bigger impact in one or two specific projects.
- The small-group members' morale is built up as they serve with people from other small groups and realize their group is just a small part of a bigger whole.
- Inviting the entire church to join you in serving that day will give opportunities for groups to invite unconnected church members into their small group.

Centralized Disadvantages

- This kind of event can cause the church body to feel "puffed up" if the service is done with an attitude other than love.
- The date picked for the service projects may not work for all small groups. We all live busy lives with packed schedules.
- Not every group will have ownership with the service projects the church picks, and therefore may or may not participate.

De-centralized Strategy

Our de-centralized strategy requires less work from the church office or service coordinator, but still requires the same amount of vision casting as the centralized model in order to gain momentum and maintain it.

- **Step One:** Create a list of local missions the church supports, as well as local parachurch and non-profit organizations that serve the poor or disabled.
- **Step Two:** From the list of ministries and organizations, select the ministries you think your small groups might be able to help in practical ways.
- **Step Three:** Contact the selected ministries and organizations to let them know you have given their names and contact information to your small groups, and that those groups are planning to invade the community over a pre-determined time. The organization may receive a call from a small group to set up a service project and date.
- **Step Four:** Communicate to your small-group leaders the selected ministries and organizations you know would benefit from being served by a small group. You can mail the leaders a list, make it available at a booth in church, or post it on the church's website.
- **Step Five:** Ask groups to select a service project from the list the church has provided, or have them consider a service project they see needing done in their neighborhood or community.
- **Step Six:** Once each group decides which service project they plan to do, all the preparation is done by those in the small group. The small group decides the date, the time, supplies needed, and handles the communication needed to get the project done.

De-centralized Advantages

- This approach provides greater ownership and potential life-changing opportunities because the group has more involvement in the planning.
- A de-centralized strategy allows groups to serve at a time most convenient for them.
- Small Groups often come up with service projects that are creative and meet deeply felt needs.
- There are usually one or more people in each small group that have a personal connection with the people they will be serving.
- The service projects are driven by the small-group leaders and, therefore, require less time from the church staff.

De-centralized Disadvantages

- Leadership and desire must be present in the group leader in order to move the group towards completing a service project. In other words, ownership of the project by the group leader is key.

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- Everything depends on the small group, but some small groups are not equipped to successfully plan and execute a community service project.
- Splitting into individual groups does not contain the power of more hands working together on fewer projects in order to have a potentially greater impact.

There is one question that has not been asked yet. Does reaching out through service projects make a difference? The answer should always be yes. Such projects may make a difference in someone else's life, but they should always make an impact in our lives. Paula, one of our group members, discovered this first hand. She writes:

I am so happy that we are involved in so many initiatives throughout the community. So many people are going through a hard time right now. I realized last Sunday in the park that we all are really just the same. Our circumstances may be different, but what we need as human beings is virtually the exact same. The first time I went to the park to serve the homeless, I really didn't know what to do. There were plenty of people to serve the food so I sorted clothes and helped people find their sizes.

Last Sunday I asked Brigitte what I needed to do and she said, "Just talk to the people and let them know through your actions that you love them." Wow! Nobody told me I would have to do that. It was a bit uncomfortable at first. What should I talk about? So I just went around with a garbage bag and collected empty plates and water bottles. I sat on a bench with a young, very shy man and told him about Late Church. He was so soft spoken it was hard to hear him sometimes. When I told him that I was going to continue around with my garbage bag, he said, "Thanks for talking to me." I held back the tears. That is really all that most of these people want—some compassion and encouragement, just to know that someone cares.

Sometimes the simplest service opportunities can make the biggest difference.

— MARK INGMIRE; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.



Event Planning Packet

Community Church
123 Any Street, State 0000
(000) 111-2222

Please complete each sheet and distribute to the appropriate person. If a sheet does not apply to your event, write NONE across it and submit it to the office.

The church office welcomes your questions and the opportunity to help make your event successful.

Office Manager:

John Smith

Phone Ext.: 101 Jsmith1@YourLocalChurch.com

Director of Children's Ministry:

Jake Smith

Phone Ext: 102 Jsmith2@YourLocalChurch.com

Coordinator of Children's Ministry:

Jack Smith

Phone Ext. 103 Jsmith3@YourLocalChurch.com

Lead Custodian:

Jill Smith

Phone Ext. 104 Jsmith4@YourLocalChurch.com

Director of Empowerment Ministry:

George Smith

Phone Ext. 105 Gsmith1@YourLocalChurch.com

Coordinator of Worship:

Jane Smith

Phone Ext. 106 Jsmith5@YourLocalChurch.com

Who To Contact

BPC Church Office (310) 826-5656

<i>When I need...</i>	Contact ¹	Complete ²
- to put an event on the calendar	John	Page 1
- to reserve a room	John	Page 1
- to arrange childcare	Jake or Jack	Pages 3-4
- to put an announcement in the bulletin	John	Page 2
- to have an announcement in worship	Jane	Page 2
- to request room setup and cleanup	John	Page 5
- to have a table on the patio on Sunday	John	by phone/email
- to get names of people to invite	George Smith	by phone/email
- to leave a sign-up registration sheet in the church office	John	by phone/email
- to book the use of the kitchen	John	Pages 1, 5
- to get an orientation of the kitchen	Jill Smith	555-666-7777
- to get a budget approved	Elder/Deacon/Staff	put in mailbox
- to communicate with staff, elders, or deacons	Mailboxes in the church office, phone/email	
- a key to access a room	John	by phone/email

Notes:

¹ The names and title of the contact people are listed on the front side of this page.

² The appropriate page in the Event Planning Packet is listed. If what you need does not require filling out a page, a phone call or email can probably take care of the need.

Community Church

General Event Planning Sheet

Please return this form to John Smith as soon as information is available for scheduling of staff and other users of the facility.

Event: _____ Event Date: _____

Committee: _____ Chair: _____ Phone: _____

Room Requested: _____

Scheduled on master calendar? _____

(The Office Manager is responsible for the maintenance of the master calendar. All event dates need to be cleared through that person.)

Committee Functions:

These people are in charge of:

1. Program: _____

2. Registration: _____

3. Publicity: _____

4. Child care: _____

(please have your committee person check the child care guidelines listed in the Event Planning Packet.)

5. Food: _____

6. Set up: _____

7. Clean up: _____

Other Needs:

1. Will your event need a sound/microphone set-up? YES NO

2. Will your event need musical accompaniment? YES NO

Date Information Submitted to John: _____

Community Church

Publicity

Please review the following guidelines and information regarding publicity for your event, then fill out the bottom tear-off and return it to John Smith at the church office.

1. **The Bulletin** is published weekly on Thursday afternoons. If you wish your event announced in the Bulletin only, please submit the information below by **Thursday one week prior** to the week you want to have your event promoted. (i.e. **10 days in advance** of the Sunday you wish it to appear.)

2. **The Weekly Email** is published weekly and sent out late Thursday afternoons. If you wish your event announced in the bulletin only, please submit the information below by **Thursday one week prior** to the week you want to have your event promoted. (i.e. **10 days in advance** of the Sunday you wish it to appear.)

3. **Announcements** in worship must be cleared through the Worship Team. If you have an announcement, please contact Jane Smith to get approval for your announcement. Established events are limited to one announcement; new programs are limited to two announcements. **Announcements are limited to two minutes.**

+++++

Event: _____ Event Date: _____

Event Location: _____ Event Time: _____

Committee: _____ Chair: _____

Publicity Person: _____ Contact Info: _____

Description of event: _____

For more information or RSVP, contact: _____

Date Information Submitted to Office Manager: _____

Community Church

Childcare Guidelines

The following definitions of Childcare Guidelines and Request Form were approved by the Children's Ministry Committee at its regular meeting on February 6, 2007. Please study them and incorporate them into your activity planning. A signed copy of these guidelines is necessary for the completion of event packets.

Children's Ministry is committed to nurturing children in their Christian faith, providing them with opportunities to grow in God's grace, and enabling them to develop the spiritual resources necessary for life's journey and a loving relationship with God, self and others.

– Children's Ministry Statement of Purpose

Definitions

Childcare refers to supervision with adequate staffing and a range of appropriate activities for ages 0 - 5 years.

Children's Program refers to an appropriate program and staffing for ages 6 - 10 years.

Ratios for staffing (provider to child): Ages 0-2: 1:3 Ages 3-5: 1:5 Ages 6-10: 1:8

Children's Ministry requires that there be a minimum of two childcare providers at all times.

Costs

*Childcare costs are borne by the requesting committee. Childcare providers will be paid as follows:

\$12.50 per hour if provider is on church payroll (to be reported via their timecard and paid once a month).

\$10.50 per hour if provider is not on church payroll (to be paid cash at the end of the event).

There is no minimum required.

Time Line

Childcare requests should be submitted in writing to the **Coordinator of Children's Ministry** at least 4 weeks prior to the event.

Requests for **Children's Programming** should be submitted in writing to the **Director of Children's Ministry** at least 6-8 weeks prior to the event.

Limitations

No childcare or programs will be provided for events extending beyond 9:00 PM.

Uninterrupted childcare will not exceed 4 daytime or 3 nighttime hours.

Unless children's programming is provided, children ages 6-12 must be with their parents and not running around or outside of church property. Staffed play yards may be opened for age-appropriate children for short periods of time.

Publicity

Childcare requires reservations. All publicity for any event offering childcare must include the statement, "Childcare by reservation only" and indicate that reservations are to be made no later than 5 days before the event. Children's Ministry approval must be obtained before publicity goes out.

Cancellation

Childcare is subject to cancellation when no reservations are made five days before the event.

PLANNING A GROUP SERVICE PROJECT

Authorization

The Coordinator of Children's Ministry may decline authorization for childcare and/or programming if he or she determines that the facility is inadequate or there is a lack of appropriate staffing, supplies, equipment, etc.

The Coordinator will respond in writing specifying the plan for childcare and/or programming.

I have read the above Childcare Guidelines and will adhere to them. I understand that failure to request childcare within the stated planning period may result in the inability to grant my request.

Signature of Person Planning Event

Date

Event

Community Church

Childcare Request Form

Submit this form to the Coordinator of Children's Ministry, Jack Smith, according to Childcare Guidelines Time Lines.

Event: _____ Committee: _____

Event Chair(s): _____ Telephone(s): _____

Email address(s): _____ Caregiver Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Event Date: _____ Event Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

1. What is the purpose of this event? (i.e. spiritual development, fellowship, etc.)

2. For whom is this event? (i.e. parents, couples, singles, all-church event, etc.)

3. How many adult people are expected to attend? _____

4. How many children are estimated to attend? _____

Nursery (0-2): _____ Preschool (3-5): _____ Elementary (6-10): _____

5. Is this event a new program this year or an ongoing one? _____

If ongoing, has there always been childcare? _____ If so, how many children came in the past? _____

If not, were people not able to attend in the past due to the lack of childcare? _____

6. Estimate how many people would not be able to attend if childcare was not offered? _____

7. Is there an appropriate program Children's Ministry could offer in conjunction with this event?

8. Childcare costs are borne by the requesting committee. See reverse for charges.

Charge to: _____ (Committee) Total Charge: _____

Will parents be charged for childcare? YES (Per child fee: _____) NO

PLANNING A GROUP SERVICE PROJECT

Coordinator's Worksheet

Facilities:

Rooms	Children (#)	Staff (#)	Staff (Names)
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Programming:

Community Church

Set-up Request

Return this form to John Smith's box at least one week prior to the event.

Event: _____ Event Date: _____

Room Desired: _____ Time: _____

Committee: _____ Chair: _____ Phone: _____

Number of people: _____

- Kitchen Required: YES NO (If "yes," contact Jill Smith)
- Round Tables (BPC owns 15/60") Expect furniture rental delivery
- Oblong Tables (BPC owns 27/8') Date: _____ Time: _____
- Chairs (BPC owns 300 stacking) Expect food delivery
- Microphones Date: _____ Time: _____
- Podium with microphone and submitted Check Request Form for food/rental completed

Full sound system (sound person required)

Portable TV/VCR

Movie Projector Screen

Slide Projector Screen

Rear Projection Screen

Blackboard Flipchart

Easel for sign: Large Table

Coffee Decaf Tea Water

Church to provide: tablecloths disposable plates napkins dishes silver

paper cups creamer/sugar other: _____

Please draw out the way you would like the room set up:

Form completed by: _____

Date Completed: _____

Celebration Evaluation

Thank you for participating in Community Church's recent Summerfest Outreach. We value the time and energy you put into your service. We want to be good stewards of the people, time, and resources God has given to Community Church, and we'd like your help.

Every year, we ask ourselves, "How can we make Summerfest even better than last year?" Please take a few moments and reflect on your recent service. Your answers will go a long way in helping us improve for the next time we host this event.

1. What are your overall impressions of this year's event?

2. What would you like to see us change for next year?

3. What would you like to see us do again?

4. What would you like us to enhance for next year?

5. (If applicable) Do you sense that we stayed close to our budget and timeline in running this event?



60 Ways to Reach Out

These practical suggestions can help your group minister to “the least of these.”

By The River Church Community

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’” (Matthew 25:34–36).

10 Ways to Feed the Hungry

When it comes to feeding those who are hungry, there’s no need for you or your group to wait for more education or information. This is something you can do now, and an easy way to make a real difference in someone’s life today.

1. Carry fast food coupons or grocery store certificates in your wallet to give to those you encounter who ask for help.
2. Order an extra coffee, bagel, or hamburger so you can share it on your way out.
3. Encourage a person in need to call the Food Connection at 1-800-984-3663 and find a nearby agency that will serve them healthy food with dignity. If possible, you make the call and then lead the person to the food provider’s door.
4. To truly understand the challenges of the hungry, organize your small group for an extended fast. Support each other and share your experiences, while praying for others coping with hunger. Get the book [God’s Chosen Fast](#), by Arthur Wallis, for guidance on safe, appropriate fasting that pleases God.
5. Encourage each member in your group to visit [The Hunger Site](#) every day. Each click on this site generates a cup of food for hungry people in third-world countries.
6. Sign up for an afternoon to sort, deliver, or serve food with one of the many organizations that serve the hungry. Your group could even try to build up to a weekly commitment or organize a collection effort in your workplace or school to get others involved with you.
7. Donate to [American’s Second Harvest](#), or use their [Food Bank Locator](#) to find an opportunity for your group to volunteer.
8. Sign on to <http://www.fh.org> for the international Christian-based organization Food for the Hungry. Sign up for an advocacy kit and learn about ways to get active on the global scale. Read and respond to current prayer requests.
9. Encourage your company or business to join [Second Helpings](#), a Food Bank program that dispatches trucks to retrieve food at cafeterias, unsold during the day, to serve at soup kitchens and homeless shelters in the evening. Call 1-800-870-3663 to sign up.
10. Add extra nutritional staples to your shopping list and make a weekly donation to a local agency serving the poor.

10 Ways to Help the Thirsty

The solutions for getting water to the thirsty are proven and simple: wells, purification, irrigation, and training. The infrastructure to help is available, and the solutions are relatively inexpensive.

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1. Go to <http://www.watermagazine.com> for a very fast education about the global water situation. This exhaustive resource covers every imaginable aspect with links to the World Health Organization and other respected sources.
2. If you're within striking distance of a water-poor area, consider going on a short-term compassion trip as a group to dig wells and train maintenance volunteers.
3. Donate online to global efforts. Some of the more successful efforts include christianchildrensfund.org, which has a designated water fund; globalwater.org; and waterforchildrenafrica.org.
4. Support efforts like World Vision that teach modern farming techniques, which prevent over-harvesting and stripping—two major causes of evaporating water sources.
5. Research and support a Denver-based company called Healing Waters International. This company works to build self-sustaining projects that allow local churches to provide cheap, clean water to those who need it.
6. Help spread awareness by sharing your research findings and passion with other people in your life. Often, people only need to be encouraged or motivated by a friend, and then they'll get involved, too.
7. Contact the organization you decide to support and find out how you can lobby at home on its behalf. You can write your congressperson and your U.S. Senators. Get to know their aides who specialize in the well-being of developing nations.
8. Be a "silent" partner. If you're unable to travel or provide financial assistance, you can faithfully use the power of prayer to help a community find water solutions so it can be healthy and prosperous. Research places in need by using the resources in this list. Track your adopted location if you can, and watch to see what God does.
9. Teach children to value water. Discover together how conservation is a gift you can give to all of society, and learn more at the U.S. Geological Survey's kids' site.
10. As a small group, research the stewardship issues surrounding bottled water. Consider transitioning to tap or filtered water as a cheaper and less wasteful alternative.

10 Ways to Help Strangers

Whether through your time, your financial resources, or both, your small group can discover many ways to welcome the strangers in your community. Use this list to set your imagination in motion and put your hands into action.

1. Join the conspiracy. Learn how by reading The Conspiracy of Kindness, by Steve Sjogren. This is a refreshing and new approach to sharing the love of Jesus with others in practical ways. You'll be inspired by the simple acts—like mowing a lawn—that you can do to touch the soul of a stranger. Work together as a group, and even get other groups to conspire with you.
2. Learn a new language, like Spanish. Having another way to communicate will make you that much more accessible for God's purposes.
3. Visit a senior citizens' center and help with social activities, or make regular visits to a senior home. Giving a routine dose of hugs or smiles will help you a lot, as well.
4. Teach English as a second language (ESL) classes. Dozens of local agencies provide this vital service, and you can start researching at the English as a Second Language website.
5. Staff a crisis line for battered women. It's not difficult for members of your group to become screened, trained, and assigned to a regular shift. For more information, see the National Domestic Violence Hotline.
6. Help a homeless person find emergency shelter. You can find shelters in your area by using the Yahoo! index of homeless shelters.
7. Consider a deeper investment into the lives of strangers by mentoring adults and children with developmental disabilities. You can find out more through The Mentor Network.

PLANNING A GROUP SERVICE PROJECT

8. Individually or as a group, practice random acts of kindness with the people you come in contact with every day. Learn more, and get practical suggestions, through the [Random Acts of Kindness Foundation](#).
9. Use the collected gifts of your group members by joining forces for regular service projects benefiting the members of your community.
10. Learn the power of small things done with great love by practicing servant evangelism. Find out more at [ServantEvangelism.com](#).

10 Ways to Clothe Others

With a little extra care and planning, you can leverage your clothing donations to make a big impact. Your consideration will genuinely touch the people and agencies you serve.

1. Clean out your closet at the beginning of a season so your donations can get the most use.
2. Save volunteers the sweat of making your donated clothes presentable. Make sure your clothes are clean, pressed, on hangers, and in overall good condition. Only donate clothes you would still consider wearing yourself—especially if you’re contributing career clothing.
3. Though a clean closet might feel like a real accomplishment, the work has just begun. Understand how your donation will be used. For instance, when you donate to Goodwill, your clothes are sold in stores to raise funds for job training and placement for the disabled and others with special needs, rather than given away for free to the needy.
4. Make a special effort to acquire and donate men’s suits and work clothes. These are especially needed for men between jobs or in transition from shelters or prison. In general, far fewer men’s clothes are donated than women’s.
5. Organize friends, co-workers, or other small groups to assemble back-to-school backpacks with supplies for children in shelters, or in other family agencies.
6. Some people leave their homes in emergencies and need the basics for comfort and warmth. Consider donating coats, blankets, sheets, pillows, sleeping bags, towels, and small-sized toiletries.
7. Donate store gift certificates for Payless, Wal-Mart, or other smart shopping spots so individuals can pick out brand new clothes and shoes that appeal to their tastes.
8. If you want to help disaster, war, or fire victims, make a cash donation to the American Red Cross or Salvation Army. That way, the agencies can relay your support to the most urgent need without the added burden of warehousing, sorting and distributing massive donations.
9. So, you don’t have any clothes to give away? Pitch in to organize the contributions of others. Offer your time on a Saturday morning to help an agency listed in this section. Sort and display clothing so it’s ready for clients during the week.
10. When you go to a big sale, buy lots of new undershirts, underwear, and socks to donate with your other items.

10 Ways to Care for the Sick

While taking care of the sick, it’s important to keep yourself healthy. Some illnesses are contagious, while others require so much support that they drain your reserves and leave you prone to a different attack. Either way, one of the best things you can do for the people you’re helping is to keep yourself well.

1. If a friend or relative is sick, has had a baby or even a routine surgery, send a card, make a phone call or pay a visit. The personal touch really helps.
2. Offer to drive the sick person to and from appointments—especially daily cancer treatments or inpatient procedures.
3. Donate blood! It’s not as gruesome as it sounds. Consult with American Red Cross or your hospital of choice to find a program you can support.

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4. Sign-up to make regular visits to a local hospital to deliver books, magazines, and smiles. You can even rotate these visits between group members.
5. Give practical and emotional support to people with AIDS, and support the continuing efforts to find a cure at AIDS.gov.
6. Make a home-cooked meal and deliver the food in convenient disposable containers available at grocery stores.
7. Be proactive—learn first aid. Sign up for CPR classes and other emergency assistance programs, or volunteer to teach others.
8. Get outdoors and help with recreation and therapeutic programs for physically and mentally disabled children and adults.
9. If you have single or elderly friends under the weather, special TLC like bringing chicken noodle soup or renting a movie to watch with them will go a long way to take the loneliness out of being sick.
10. Donate time, financial resources, or prayer support to the [Global Health Access Program](#)—an organization providing medicine and care for communities in crisis around the globe.

10 Ways to Help Prisoners

Prisoners live in a state of crisis. They are helpless to help their families, and they are stripped of their influences and resources to even help themselves. Consider these ways you can ease the burden of someone who has made a wrong turn and now pays the price—or help prevent the wrong turn before it's even made.

1. Serve prisoners by joining or starting a church-affiliated effort to lead Bible studies for inmates. These work best through teams that offer guidance and encouragement.
2. God has a lot to say about crime and justice. In your small group, use a Bible with a concordance to look up sections about punishment and forgiveness. What are your thoughts?
3. Four out of five people in prison today grew up with a close relative who also served time in prison. Learn about ways to minister to the children of inmates through Awana Clubs International's [Returning Hearts](#) program.
4. Use the education and training resources of the Prison Fellowship Ministry, founded by Chuck Colson. Visit the Web site at www.pfm.org to learn Biblical teachings about prison and how to sign up for special classes.
5. Support local substance abuse rehabilitation services with your time and financial help.
6. Support [Koinonia House National Ministries](#)—a non-profit organization that ministers to Christians coming out of prison through the Meet Me at the Gate program.
7. Prison sentences separate families. Help keep them together by donating Greyhound bus vouchers through [Friends Outside](#).
8. Amnesty International won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 for its work to protect the rights of political and other prisoners, including those in the United States. Visit their [USA website](#) to learn about Amnesty's campaign in this country and see if there's a role for you.
9. Research pro bono legal assistance for ways to connect people in need of legal assistance with those who can help. Start your education at ProBono.net.
10. Consider providing support and encouragement for an inmate through the [Inmate Pen Pal Connection](#).

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Discuss:

1. What did our group learn from our last outreach experience?
2. Which of these ideas excites me the most? Which is the most frightening?
3. What organizations or opportunities exist in our community that would allow us to practice these ideas?



Assign Service as Homework

Move a burdensome task into a life-changing experience.

By Sue Skalicky

I have often debated the matter of small-group homework. As a group leader, I spend many hours each week preparing a lesson and pastoring those in my group with encouraging notes, emails, hospital visits, occasional lunch dates, and prayer. This is what I love to do and I am committed to the sacrifice of time and energy.

But what about the members of my small group? Each week I strive to offer them a place to belong and grow. Those two hours become a sanctuary set apart from the rush of living; they allow each person time to worship, learn, pray, and fellowship. I've always designed my lessons to accommodate those new to the group, or those who didn't get a chance to read the chapter of our current book or section of Scripture. But, I've never given homework—until now.

Outreach—the often-forgotten dimension of small groups—has been knocking at the door of my heart this past year. I've specifically been challenged by Steve Sjogren's book *Conspiracy of Kindness*. Reading this book stirred my soul. I was challenged to embrace the lifestyle of showing a watching world the gospel of Jesus Christ through servant evangelism.

My small group read this book two summers ago. Our meeting times were spent out in the community putting what we had learned to the test. We washed windshields, returned empty garbage cans, handed out cold cans of pop to construction workers, inserted quarters at the Laundromat, and cleaned public toilets. Then we gathered back together to enjoy refreshments and share our experiences. Without exception, the reports were filled with excitement and awe at the response to God's love shown in practical ways. It's been over a year since we read this book, but the stories still come to my attention. This idea of servant evangelism has made its way from just a great idea to a way of life for many in my small group.

Consequently, I now give my small-group members homework. I send them out the door into the coming week with a challenge—an invitation to apply what they've learned. There is a world watching those of us who make known our faith in Jesus Christ, but sadly, our preaching alone often hits ears turned deaf to its perceived platitudes. As much as we need to be living in community and growing in our faith, we also need to be drenching a parched world with the life-changing gift of God's love.

The following are a few examples of homework assignments I've given my group in the past year:

- Encourage your group members to ask God this question at some point in the coming week: "How can I show your love to the next person that crosses my path?" Then do it. Take a few minutes during your next meeting to hear some of the stories.
- Ask each member to bring in a photo of someone they know who needs God in their life. Make copies of the photos and staple them together. Then, give each member of your group a copy of this outreach album and encourage them to pray for each person in it over the next week (and beyond).
- Ask each group member to invite one person (family member, neighbor, co-worker) to lunch in the coming week. Emphasize that many people don't have someone in their life that would sacrifice their time to just be with them. Often the invitation alone is enough to help heal a wounded heart.
- As a group, put together a basket filled with candy, baked treats, packets of hot chocolate, and so on. Surround these with personal notes of encouragement, Scripture, and written prayers. Give this basket to a predetermined person or family in need (new baby, newly married, death in the family, new to town, graduation, promotion). Spend some time at the end of your meeting praying for these people.

Small-group homework doesn't have to be a chore. It can be the moment where our knowledge becomes the living body of Christ.

—SUE SKALICKY; copyright 2001 by the author and Christianity Today International.



Further Exploration

Websites and books to help your group serve in your community.

SmallGroups.com. Small-groups training resources from Christianity Today International.

- [Small Groups and Evangelism](#) — Training Theme
- [Missional Small Groups](#) — Training Theme
- [Small-Group Assimilation Strategies](#) — Practical Ministry Skills

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Creating Community by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits. Five key discoveries that have helped North Point Community Church connect over 8,000 people through small groups (Multnomah, 2005; ISBN 978-1590523964).

Destination: Community by Rick Howerton. A ministry manual to help you lead a dynamic and redemptive small group (Serendipity House, 2007; ISBN 978-1-5749-4352-8).

[Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith](#) by Bill Hybels. Pastor Hybels shows you how to follow Jesus' model of personal evangelism by "living in 3-D"—developing friendships, discovering stories, and discerning appropriate ways to leave your comfort zone (Zondervan, 2006; ISBN 978-0310266693).

[Seeker Small Groups: Engaging Spiritual Seekers in Life-Changing Discussions](#) by Garry Poole. How to minister to seekers who are curious about Christ, but not yet ready to attend a formal church service (Zondervan, 2003; ISBN 978-0310242338).

[Small Group Outreach: Turning Groups Inside Out](#) by Jeff Arnold. Whether your small group is just getting started or has been together for a while, you'll find practical advice and ideas in this handbook for outreach and witness (InterVarsity Press, 1998; ISBN 978-0830811700).

[The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community](#) by Randy Frazee. This book paints a beautiful portrait of biblical community and talks about the sacrifices we will have to make in order to experience life together (Zondervan, 2000; ISBN 978-0310233084).