

Missions and Service in Sunday School

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Why do mission and service projects?

Mission and service projects are an important aspect of children's ministry and there are many ways to make them spiritually uplifting and fun. First let's talk a little bit about why these types of activities are an essential part of children and youth ministry.

Children need to live their faith.

More and more, those in Christian Education are realizing that faith formation happens not just when children are learning in a classroom; understanding what it means to be a Christian is reinforced and expanded when what children learn is put into practice.

People need help.

The church has been there for people in need from its earliest beginnings. Encouraging our children to serve and help others ensures that we won't lose sight of this important aspect of churches.

Children like to help.

It makes them feel that they're making a difference in the world and improves their self-esteem. As children grow, they begin to see that there is injustice in the world and their innate sense of fairness motivates them to do what they can to make a hurting world better.

Children learn when they help.

They learn about people that may be less well-off than they are and then appreciate more what they have. They learn that they have a lot in common with people that may seem different from them. They learn to cooperate with others for a common goal. They learn how to put others' needs ahead of their own. They learn that to be a follower of Jesus means to serve others.

We are all called to serve.

Service is not just for older children or grown-ups. Even small children can serve others in significant ways.

We share God's love by helping others.

Children learn that we are God's hands and feet in the world and that we love and serve others in God's name.

Scriptures related to missions and service from the Common English Bible translation

It's important for children to understand that we are called as Christians and in scripture to serve others, so you should always introduce any mission or service project with a lesson based on a Bible passage. Here are some suggested verses; the translation is the Common English Bible.

Micah 6:8

He has told you, human one, what is good and what the LORD requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

Matthew 22:34-39

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they met together. One of them, a legal expert, tested him. "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Matthew 24:31-40

Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me."

Then those who are righteous will reply to him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?"

Then the king will reply to them, "I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me."

Acts 20:35

In everything I have shown you that, by working hard, we must help the weak. In this way we remember the Lord Jesus' words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Galatians 5:13

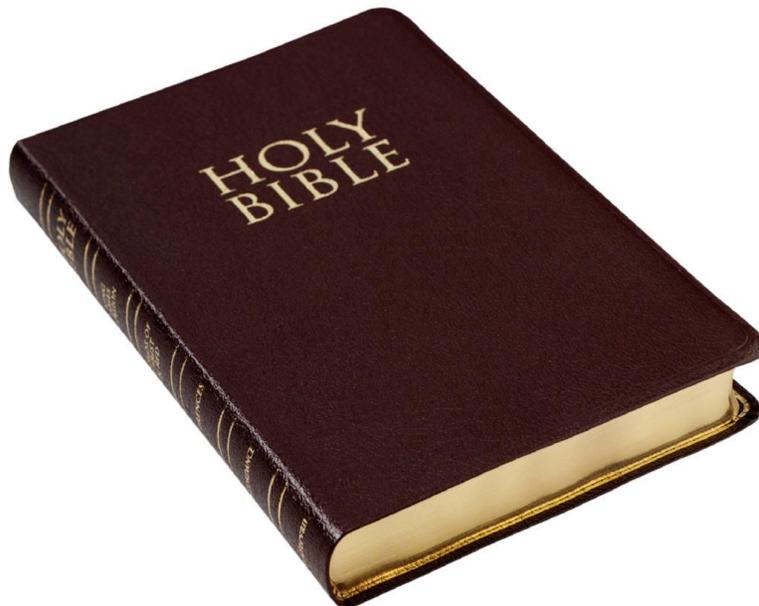
You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love.

1 Peter 4:10-11a

And serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God's diverse gifts. Whoever speaks should do so as those who speak God's word. Whoever serves should do so from the strength that God furnishes. Do this so that in everything God may be honored through Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:18

Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth.



Whom do we serve?

Family and friends

You may not think of doing things for family and friends as mission and service projects, but this is a good area to start in, especially for younger children. For a baby, the world centers on him or herself, and as children grow they need to be taught to think of others rather than themselves. Projects for families and friends could include making something, such as a craft or food, or providing some sort of service. One nice idea is having the children make coupon books, with each coupon to be redeemed for some service, such as helping to clean a room or reading to a younger sibling.

Local church

We are all called to serve our local church and children should be included in this as well. They can be involved in something that the entire church is doing or may come up with a project of their own. Even something as simple as straightening up the sanctuary after the worship service can help children feel they are contributing to their church. Or perhaps the children could be in charge of the stuffed animals of the church.

Children can help in the ongoing missions of your church, such as your food pantry or soup kitchen. They can collect food and clothing for the needy. Although they may not be able legally to be involved at the actual mealtime in your soup kitchen, they can decorate the area with placemats and centerpieces.

Home-bound members of your congregation might be happy to have some children visit or might enjoy receiving hand-made cards and gifts. Perhaps each Sunday school class could adopt a different individual.

Elderly people or those with disabilities who are unable to adequately care for their homes and yards could be helped by your children and youth who might rake leaves, change light bulbs, or decorate for holidays.

Local community/schools

There may be areas in your local community or the local schools where children can serve, such as a local clean-up of a public park. Contact local organizations and other churches to see what opportunities there are.

Some possibilities include: nursing homes (think about visiting at a time other than before Christmas when there may be other groups visiting), animal shelters, food pantries and soup kitchens, community gardens, homeless shelters, and hospitals. Here on Long Island, we have some churches which sponsor regular meetings of the Peanut Butter and Jelly Gang. People get together to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches which are then distributed to those in need on Long Island and in New York City.

Newsday, the Long Island newspaper, recently ran a story about a local chapter of a nonprofit group called [Birthday Wishes](#) which has chapters on Long Island, as well as Massachusetts and Rhode Island; they provide birthday parties for homeless children in shelters. Volunteers help to provide supplies and attend and run the parties.

School nurses may also have knowledge of local families in need. One church adopts several families each year at Christmas time and each Sunday school class buys toys and clothing for all the members of one family.

Local schools may also be grateful to have donations of backpacks and school supplies for families who can't afford to purchase these items.

You can also ask your children and others in your church for suggestions. Perhaps a local family lost their home in a fire or a member has a serious illness and you can head an effort to help them out.

Children may already be involved in mission and service projects through their school, scouts, or another organization. Encourage and recognize them for these efforts! How about a special bulletin board where news and photos are posted showing your church's kids and youth in action to help the world?

Denominational agencies

Another source for potential mission and service projects is your denomination. Many have annual or ongoing mission projects with free resources for children and youth.

[Episcopal Relief & Development](#) offers the Abundant Life Garden Project for elementary-school aged children with five lessons on water, seeds, soil, animals, and harvest. They also offer a children's program on malaria called Real Heroes versus Rita Mosquito. For middle and high school students there is a program called Act Out which "brings the needs and hopes of the world together with the lives of youth." Visit their [Christian Formation for Children page](#) for more information.

The Lutheran Church ELCA offers resources for children on their [World Hunger page](#).

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod offers [Mission Friends](#), a free magazine for children "with information, activities, games, songs, and ways kids can get involved with God's Mission in countries around the world." Parent and teacher's pages are included.

The Presbyterian Church USA has the [presbykids4kids](#) website. It has stories of children from around the world and ways kids can help or learn more. The Presbyterian

Church also has emergency kits that can be collected and packed by children, as well as children's resources for most of their mission projects.

The United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ have the [Kids2Kids](#) program with mission projects for children in North America and around the world. There are ideas for Bible study, prayers, songs, and fund-raising.

The [United Methodist Children's Fund for Christian Mission](#) selects a group of mission projects each year and offer activities and fundraising ideas.

National and international organizations

Although the PRC is familiar with many of these organizations, we can't officially recommend them. So be cautious and do some research before connecting with any charity to make sure it is legitimate and its philosophy and operations are compatible with those of your denomination and local church. Some of the organizations listed below are Christian and some are not.

[Angel Tree](#) is part of Prison Fellowship, which was founded by Chuck Colson. It provides Christmas gifts to children of incarcerated parents, as well as other programs and activities.

[Bread for the World](#) is a Christian organization that works to end hunger throughout the world. They offer a five-week curriculum that "helps elementary-age students learn about the Christian call to help people in need" as well as resources for youth and adults.

[Church World Service](#) is a cooperative ministry of 37 Christian denominations in the United States, "providing sustainable self-help, development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance around the world." Along with numerous other programs, they organize CROP (Christian Rural Overseas Program) Walks and distribute Hygiene Kits, School Kits, Baby Kits, and Emergency Clean-up Buckets.

[Group Cares](#) is the non-profit division of Group Publishing, and includes Group Mission Trips, Operation Kid-to-Kid (which gives kids the opportunity to help other children around the world), Squash Malaria (which offers a free kit of various items and promotional materials), and Group Gives (which honors and donates to non-profit organizations).

[Habitat for Humanity](#) builds simple, decent, and affordable housing for those who can't afford to purchase their own home. Although you must be 16 years old to actually work on a Habitat for Humanity house, they have programs for children and youth and numerous activities on their website.

[Heifer International](#) provides livestock and other appropriate animals, as well as tree seedlings, to people in need around the world. Free resources are available for children including Animal Crackers lesson plans, the Feeding 5,000 Sunday school curriculum, and the Fill the Ark four week, daily missions-giving program.

[Reading Is Fundamental](#) provides millions of children with new, free books and literacy resources each year; their priority is impoverished children from birth to age 8 years.

[Samaritan's Purse](#) is a nondenominational evangelical Christian organization providing spiritual and physical aid to people around the world. It is run by Franklin Graham, the son of evangelist Billy Graham. One of their ministries is Operation Christmas Child which distributes shoeboxes filled with a variety of gifts to children in need throughout the world.

[World Vision](#) is an evangelical Christian organization "dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice." They have a child sponsorship program and provide emergency relief, education, health care, economic development, and promote justice. They offer some free resources for children and youth and organize mission trips.



Hand on service vs. fundraising

Learning is most effective when we use as many of our senses as possible, so try to involve your children in hands-out activities when planning mission and service projects.

Especially with older children, look for opportunities to get them out of the classroom. Perhaps there is an area inside or outside of the church which they can clean or make repairs on. There may be places in your local community and other houses of worship where they children can provide services.

As much as possible, have the children make people to people contact. It may be possible that they can meet those they're ministering to, such as visiting home bound church members or those in facilities such as nursing homes. Whenever possible, involve families and other adults in your church in mission and service projects along with the children.

Look for projects where children can be creative and make crafts, gifts, promotional posters, and other physical objects.

Some organizations, especially those they minister overseas, will only take monetary donations. This doesn't mean that you can't think of fun, creative ways for the children to fundraise. Children could make baked goods or some other food during the Sunday school hour and then sell these at the church coffee hour. A car wash can be a fun way to raise money. They could also put together gift items, such as potpourri sachets, which could then be sold at a Christmas or other church fair. The children could draw or paint illustrations for a Bible story or the 23rd Psalm and the drawings could then be put together into a book which would be offered for sale. If you are fundraising for an organization such as Habitat for Humanity, the children could cut out paper bricks; donors' names are written on the bricks and then they are then displayed in the shape of a house on a bulletin board.

Be sure to get the children involved in publicizing their mission projects by having them create posters, bulletin inserts, bulletin boards, and an article for the church newsletter.

Short-term mission trips

We're often asked at the resource center for suggestions of organizations that offer short-term mission trips for youth groups. Again, we issue a disclaimer and urge you to investigate carefully any organizations offering short term mission trips for youth.

There are lots of opportunities out there and some pros and cons to these trips, but the first place to start if you're interested in getting your youth involved in a mission trip is to contact your denomination. Often these are organized on a conference, district, or diocesan level. For instance, the United Methodist Church website suggests you contact the [Volunteers in Mission](#) coordinators in your area for help finding mission trips that are appropriate for youth.

[YouthWorks](#) can help you find opportunities for youth mission trips in the US, Canada and Puerto Rico. They were mentioned on the website of the United Methodist Church.

As previously mentioned, [Group Publishing](#) offers youth mission trips as well as information and resources for planning your trip.



Safety and legal concerns

Be sure to consider safety and legal concerns when planning mission and service projects as well as mission trips. Communicate with your parents about exactly what the children and youth will be doing and where they will be going. Ask parents about any concerns they have and anything you need to know about their child, such as allergies to food or medication.

The policy that protects your children while they are in your church building should be followed when you take your children on a trip. It should include a section with information about trips outside of your church building, such as the proper chaperone

to child ratio. Adults that will be driving children should have their driving records checked.

Make sure you have permission slips which include medical information and permissions for treatment.

You can find articles that address this issue on the internet, such as one on the YouthMinistry.com website entitled [“Safety and Youth Mission Trips.”](#)



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