

Community Service Ideas

Start Within Your Own Church

Helping people:

Are there people in your congregation who could use a helping hand? This could be elderly who need help with household chores or gardening. Create teams within your youth group and then head out to these homes and help rake leaves, do small household repairs, paint or even just assist with basic clean-up. It could be parents who need a baby-sitter to be able to have a special night or attend a college class. Maybe they just need help with laundry, washing dishes or helping kids with their homework. It could be that parents could really use a break while you organise a games morning for their children or it could be a longer term project like leading children's liturgy. These are all things that teenagers can do and would be a tremendous help for the families in your parish.

Gathering food

In some parishes food is the need. Can your group figure out how to increase donations to your church's food bank and then deliver food boxes to those in need?

One idea is a [pantry raid](#):

Make sure your priest and leadership team support the idea. Check in with your parish St Vincent de Paul Conference or another local food bank to make a list of their priority needs. Advertise in your parish when the pantry raid will take place and ask for parishioners to volunteer that your group can visit their house to collect supplies. Arrange adult drivers (be sure the driver has a full licence and the car is registered/warranted/insured) and split your group into small groups – one group per car. Plan out a route for each group to collect from houses in the same area. Have one central point where everybody returns to, so that they see how many groceries were collected. In one of my previous parishes we made the groceries a focus that parishioners saw as they came to Mass that Sunday. Be sure to put a note of thanks in the weekly parish bulletin the following week and/or send a thank you card or email to those parishioners who contribute.

Another is a [reverse shopping list](#):

Get permission from local supermarket or grocery shop to set up a table near their entrance. Check with local food pantry/food bank to see what items they need the most of. Print a 'shopping list' with a brief explanation of what you are doing and the items most needed. Have youth ask shoppers as they enter to consider picking an item or two off your list to support the food pantry and drop it off at the table on the way out.

Another is a [hunger banquet](#) or “lock-in”

Catholic Relief Services has a website devoted to its FoodFast programme: <http://www.foodfast.org>. It offers prayers and reflections on hunger.

Oxfam provides all the materials you need to put on a hunger banquet (except the food). Visit: <http://actfast.oxfamamerica.org/index.php/events/banquet>. You will need to register

to download the planning guide and resources but registration is free! This document has been written for those in America but can easily be adapted for your group.

Spring clean for your Church or parish centre/hall

Another easy (and often overlooked) service project is to do a spring clean in your own Church (or other facility). This is usually easy to organise, has the advantage that everybody knows how to get there and the wider congregation often appreciate seeing the young people giving something back to their parish community.

Reach out to those in need in your local community

Every area has needs. It's important to consider the gifts and talents of the young people in your group and find a project that they will engage with. Often the best projects are ones that run over a longer period of time where the youth group members (and leaders) build up a relationship with key people the group you choose to support. Here are some ideas to get you thinking:

Soup Kitchens or Food Banks

Every city has a soup kitchen or food bank that is always looking for more volunteers. Your youth can volunteer to serve food to the area's homeless. Or they can collect used clothing or collect food donations to donate to the soup kitchen or food bank. If your youth have never volunteered at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, this could be an incredibly eye-opening experience for them. You can talk to your youth about what the Bible says about feeding the poor and clothing the needy or even create an entire Bible study around this and plan several days of volunteering at a local soup kitchen or food bank to go with the Bible study.

Rest Homes

Some of your congregation's elderly members may be living in rest homes already. You can arrange for your youth group to visit the homes and just spend time with the elderly there. They can talk with them, play games, read to them or plan other fun activities at the rest home that can be done as a group. If you want to get creative, you can come up with a whole programme filled with songs, short skits and fun giveaways and contests for the residents. If you are looking for a service opportunity leading up to Christmas then singing Christmas carols is often popular in rest homes.

Little Sisters of the Poor in Ponsonby are ALWAYS looking for groups of young people who are willing to come and spend time with their residents and assist the Sisters at the Home. For more information check their website: <http://www.littlesistersofthepoor.org.au/auckland.html> or contact Sr Rita-Mary on 361 4600.

Pregnancy Help

If you have lots of young families in your parish or community how about doing a collection of baby clothes and goods for Pregnancy Help.

Emergency Housing Shelters and Women's Refuges

In Auckland there are many shelters and refuges. Your group could collect food, household goods, furniture or clothing to help those in need. Three that are closely linked to the Catholic Church are:

[Monte Cecelia Housing Trust](#) (Mangere)

[De Paul House](#) (North Shore)

[Mother of Divine Mercy Refuge](#) (West)

The [ACYM Office](#) can provide contact details for these organisations.

Have a fun day: A fun activity that we have run with Monte Cecelia in the past is to have a games morning. Our young people organised outdoor games for the children, face painting etc. If it is a wet day then indoor games or making and painting a large poster are great options. If your budget permits it's a good idea to finish with a shared BBQ or drinks and snacks.

If your group are good early in the morning another option is to start with a healthy breakfast for the children. Your group would need to provide cereals and fruit and perhaps provide some entertainment or games after breakfast. To make this a multiple-meeting activity allocate one session to the youth planning for the gathering and working out what groceries they will need, how much it will cost etc. Have a second gathering which is a fund-raiser to cover the costs of the breakfast supplies. You may also wish to have the youth group do the shopping for the supplies. Alternatively you could ask each member of the youth group to bring supplies to the event.

Another idea is to make small activity packs for children. Each pack might have some sheets on paper for colouring in or other activities that are suitable for the age-group that you aiming for. The packs could also have crayons, colour books, small toys etc.

Ask parishioners to donate new toiletries and make these into packs for people living in shelters, refuges etc.

Beach, park or neighbourhood clean-up

Keeping New Zealand's shores free from rubbish is a great way to help ensure the safety of marine mammals. You can organise your own beach cleanup or take part in a scheduled event. Go to the [Project Jonah](#) website for details of scheduled events and a handy planning sheet if you are organising your own clean-up. You can also visit the [Auckland City website](#) for ways to volunteer at local parks.

Take a look at the neighbourhood that you live in. What needs are there? Is there rubbish on the streets that needs to be picked up? Is there graffiti on walls? Check with your local Council office to ask if you can help. Be aware that some Councils have contractors responsible for this work so if you are keen to help in the wider community it is a really good idea to check in with the Council first.

Assist with a service at the hospital

Many hospitals have one or more Sunday services. Patients can only go to the service if there are volunteers to collect them from the ward, take them to the service and return them

back to the ward. Contact the [ACYM Office](#) for contact details for the chaplain for your closest hospital.

Fundraising for a group in need

There are many organisations in our community that need financial assistance. Doing a fund-raiser for a local community group is a great way of both raising the profile of that group and raising money to help them. Check the [ACYM website](#) for a list of ideas for meetings with young people that includes fundraising ideas.

Preparing Food

Cooking and baking teach young people useful skills whilst at the same time providing free food for those in need. One of the Inner City groups does baking for the families at Monte Cecilia before Easter and Christmas most years. They have also made sandwiches and soup for a local shelter (they can freeze the soup and use it later if there is no immediate need). The options are endless – just be sure that you have somebody leading the session who knows what they are doing!

Prison Ministry

If you are working with a young adult group you may wish to check with the Prison Chaplaincy Team to see if there are opportunities for your young people to visit the prison. In Auckland we have had young adult groups lead prayer services at Mt Eden Prison and we are currently looking for young adults who are keen to be friends of people who have recently left prison.

Make 'Spirit of Christmas' boxes

Each member takes a box to fill with homemade items or donations. Boxes could be distributed to those from your own community who are in need or you might want to donate the boxes to another parish or community group.

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