

# Community Service Guide

## Preparing and Reflecting

Participating in service is an opportunity for young people to put their faith into action, engaging in service projects that contribute to the life of the local community.

At the end of the Mass we are called to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord”. What does this mean? How do we as individuals go out into the world, in love and service of others and of God? Service gives us the opportunity to explore this call more deeply.

Essential to experience of service is the provision of time and a means to process and reflect on the action of service. In providing this time and space, it also gives us an opportunity to spend time with one another sharing personal experiences of their different cultures and lives.

What follows is a suggested framework for helping young people to consider, through this experience:

- Why and how they are called by their Christian Faith to engage with the world in service and solidarity; and
- How they might specifically respond to the issues and situations they encounter through the chosen service activity.

## The preparation/reflection process

Preparing for and reflecting on the experience, can be addressed through a simple three-stage process of reflecting before, during and after the activity. Information included in this sheet is a suggestion or guide only. Facilitators of these activities are encouraged to take and use the information and/or adapt for their own purposes.

### **Before**

In beginning the activities for the day, gather the group together in the church, a parish meeting room or other convenient location. Allow some time before you set out to introduce young people to one another (if they don't already know each other) and also to the activity in which they will be participating. It is also an important time for young people to reflect on the purpose of the service time and their particular activity and therefore enter into the activity in the right frame of mind. Below is a suggested outline of this introductory session:

- Opening prayer and scripture reflection
- Introductions
- Overview of the service activity
- Input for reflection
- Identify group and individual hopes for the service activity
- Closing prayer
- Setting out

## Suggested opening prayer

God of Justice  
In the midst of conflict and division  
We know it is you  
Who turns our minds to thoughts of peace  
Your Spirit changes our hearts

Enemies begin to speak to one another  
Those who were estranged join hands in friendship  
And nations seek the way of peace together.  
Let Your Spirit be at work in us.  
Give us understanding and put an end to strife,  
Fill us with mercy and overcome our denial  
Grant us wisdom and teach us to learn from the people of the land  
Call us to justice  
(Adapted from the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses of Reconciliation II)

### Suggested scripture readings

John 15:16-17

You did not choose me, no I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you anything you ask in my name.  
My command to you is to love one another.

Matthew 25:31-40

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.

Matthew 20:25-28

Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be the first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

### During

Some questions that participants can use for inner reflection during the activity include:

- How do I feel now that I am doing the activity?
- How do I think the people I am interacting with feel?
- How do I think I might feel if I was in their shoes?
- What have I most noticed during this activity?
- What further positive action could be taken?

### Further questions for deepening process of reflection:

#### *Personal Reflection*

Examine how we feel about entering into this day

- What is our previous experience of service?
- How do I feel about marginalised people?
- What is your perception of what other people feel about marginalised people?
- How do the media portray marginalised groups and individuals?
- Are the marginalised reported on in the media at all?

Social analysis – examining the causes and consequences of injustice and poverty

- Why is this happening?
- Why is the group or community marginalised?
- What are the factors contributing to and perpetuating poverty and marginalisation?
- What are the economic, social, political and cultural influences?
- What are the behaviours, structures, processes, and institutions influencing the lives of this marginalised group – in positive and negative ways?
- How do we as individuals contribute to the poverty of the marginalised?

Theological and Spiritual Reflection – sharing the light of the gospels on our experience of situations of injustice. Praying in and through the experience?

- What do the scriptures teach us about service of the poor and marginalised?
- What do the scriptures teach us about Social Justice?
- What do the scriptures teach us about situations of injustice?
- How does the Catholic Social Teaching inform us about Social Justice?
- What are our roles and responsibilities, as young Catholics, toward addressing injustice in our world, and especially in our own local communities?
- How are we “called” to respond to what we experience in our lives?
- Where is God in this experience?
- Are we contributors to the building of a kingdom of justice and peace for all peoples?
- How does the charism of our founder/s speak to us in this experience? (For groups associated with Religious Orders eg Marist, Josephite, Franciscan, Mercy, etc)

### After

On returning to the original meeting place take some time to discuss individuals’ reactions to the experience of involvement in the activity. The questions raised for reflection during the activity could form a basis for this discussion as well as the questions listed below:

- What is my response to the experience?
- What action/s can I make in my everyday life to make a difference in my local community?
- What are some of the practical ways that I can support marginalised people or care for my local environment?
- How can I challenge the systems and structures that perpetuate the situation/s experienced by people in my local community?

Break into small groups again for participants to share their feelings about the experience and their thoughts on the reflection questions. Encourage participants then to share with the whole group the extent to which they felt their original hopes for the activity had been fulfilled. As a result of participating in the activity, ask young people to identify any new hopes or dreams they have for the local community, their own community or the global community with regards to the issue/s that the activity has addressed (conservation, homelessness, loneliness etc).

Our dream would be that the time of service, well prepared and reflected on, will prepare our young people to return to their own situations desiring to make service a priority in their daily lives.

Source: Adapted from Activ8 NZ Preparing for Pilgrimage