

Involving Youth in Service to Others

By Fr. Michael Anderson

In keeping with the focus of Youth Month, the following are “doable” ways youth can reach out and help others in imitation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is no better time to review these, and to make outreach a regular part of your community’s youth activities.

- **Review the Resource Handbook for Lay Ministries:** Every parish receives at least two installments per year full of articles, which explain successful activities parishes have sponsored throughout the Church. Pick one and do it.
- **Servant Saturdays:** Plan a Saturday every six months when your youth group will help people in the parish (elderly, shut-ins, single parents, etc.) Obtain a list of people from your parish priest and call them to ask if they have any tasks your group can do to help them. Make a list of all the people you will be helping along with their addresses and phone numbers, the jobs requested, and estimate of how long it will take to do them, and the number of people needed. Schedule to do it on a Saturday. Meet at the parish with a bunch of bag lunches, transport everyone to their assignment and meet back at the end of the day for pizza and a movie.
- **In Search of a Square Meal:** Prepare a list of groceries needed to a complete nutritious meal, including dessert. Choose a local agency that distributes food to people in need. Form groups of 4 or 5 (include at least one adult in each group). Give a copy of the grocery list to each group along with cloth grocery bags and a supply of your church’s business card. Instruct the groups to go door to door asking the people to donate one or more of the items on the list. Be sure to supply the people one of the church’s business cards so that they know this is legitimate. Have groups explain that the food is being collected as a donation to (name of the agency with which you are working). Give groups 2 hours to collect all their items. Tell them that they are not to buy anything. When they have completed their list or at the end of 2 hours, have everyone return to the church to gather the food and debrief their experience over pizza and maybe a movie.
- **Storm Troopers:** Form teams of kids to go to people’s houses to shovel their driveway after a snow storm or clean up their yard after a bad wind storm. Make a contact list of the “troopers” as well as the people that you will be helping.
- **Recycle:** go to a recycling station get your deposits and give to a local charity. You can even connect it to a project to help clean up an area of town (see above).
- **Start a Tutoring Program out of Your Parish:** Parish youth can sign up to help younger children with reading, writing, math, or science. Offer tutoring services each month in the evening, providing a quiet, relaxing atmosphere that is good for studying, followed by some fun. Contact local elementary schools about offering your services.
- **Prepare Meals for a Nearby Soup Kitchen:** Contact a local soup kitchen and offer to prepare a meal. Find out what to cook, ask for food donations from people in the Church, and gather at the Church to prepare the meal.
- **Prepare “Sunshine” Packages:** Ask your parish priest for the names and addresses of people who are currently in the hospital, sick at home, or who are new to the community. Design a “sunshine” package that would be appropriate for their situation, make and deliver it to them.

- **Go out on Limb:** As a group plan on extending yourselves to people no one spends time with, the people no one really likes. Eat with them in the cafeteria; walk home from school with them; invite them to an activity the youth group is sponsoring; etc. Make it a regular part of your gatherings to discuss as a group their difficulties, and successes.
- **Closet Cleaning:** Have everyone in the group go through their closets to collect items in good condition that they would be willing to give to people in need. Give it to a local service organization that distributes clothing to people.
- **Buy a Toy:** Save money from allowances and jobs, go to a toy store, and buy a fun toy for a child whose family might not be able to afford them. Bring the toys to a local social service organization for them to distribute.
- **Provide Worship Services for Residents in Institutions:** Contact your parish priest about joining him when he visits the local prisons, nursing homes, and hospitals to help with singing the responses and reading at services. Vespers and moliebens are great services to have since anyone can attend them and those attending get to hear a large amount of biblical readings.
- **Book Drive:** Most institutions (prisons, nursing homes, homes for the developmentally handicapped) have poor book collections for their residents. Contact the director of an institution near you and ask for a list of books that would be helpful for them. Make it a project to collect copies of the books and deliver them to the institution, incorporating a visit with the residents. Most institutions have persons who will help prepare your group for a visitation.
- **Neighborhood Labor Day:** Send out small postcards to everyone in the parish's neighborhood announcing that the youth of the parish would like to show their appreciation for the church's neighbors by a having a work day. Provide a space on the postcard for them to indicate what kind of assistance they would find helpful (mowing lawns, washing windows, etc.). Then indicate the day and time you would be able to come, mentioning that there is no charge.
- **Offer to help people who are sick with chores:** When people are sick or in the hospital, they are often not able to keep up with many of the day to day chores in their home. Talk to your parish priest about offering assistance washing windows, taking out the garbage, vacuuming their homes, weeding gardens, getting groceries, etc. to people who are ill, or to those who are spending a lot of time caring for someone who is ill.
- **Sponsor a Child Overseas:** Using money from jobs and allowances sponsor a poor child overseas. Its an inexpensive but personal way to provide lifesaving help to someone in need. Many agencies that have these types of programs (Save the Children, UNICEF, etc.) advertise on TV.
- **Participate in Project Mexico:** Project Mexico is an Orthodox agency that builds simple homes for the many homeless people in Tijuana, Mexico. The conditions are very safe and everyone regardless of their knowledge of carpentry can participate. They also run the OCA St. Innocent orphanage for boys. Plan to go as a group during a school vacation. For more information, contact them at [619/448-1368](tel:6194481368).
- **Community Cleanup:** Choose an area in town to keep clean for the next 6 months. Contact city officials to ask if they would provide trash bags or paint to cover graffiti-covered walls, etc. One Saturday a month take a team of teens (it doesn't have to be all of them every time) to clean up the area. After, go back to the church for refreshments and relaxation.