

Developing Intentional Outreach: Social Care & Ritual for Youth Ministry **A Retreat Design for High School Youth**

Overview

As Christians, we are called to serve others and therefore engage in the world as a manifestation of our discipleship. Our congregations have long looked for opportunities to be Christ's hands and feet to those challenged with issues of poverty, hunger, and/or homelessness, to speak out against injustice, and to share resources in ways that respond to needs both locally and globally. Yet much has been said in recent years about the need to reevaluate the way in which our congregations undertake these endeavors. Despite good intentions, some have even criticized the church's participation in charitable endeavors as unexamined or even unhelpful.¹ Do shared resources create dependency? How might our efforts to engage in *giving* become a means by which intended recipients actually become disempowered? In what ways does our outreach encourage community and interpersonal connection?

Certainly, there is little evidence for one, "correct" model by which to engage in mission or congregational outreach. However, there is tremendous merit to an approach that is mindful of both intended and unintended outcomes. If we seek to foster transformation, we need to intentionally invest in the lives of others in a way that shows compassion and humility. Our programs, events, or outreach activities should lend themselves to life-changing experiences for both participants and recipients. We need to take a look at recent research suggesting missional outreach programs have a greater impact when participants work *with* recipients (collaborative and relational), as opposed to *for* recipients (direct aid).²

The following is a one day retreat designed to engage high school youth to think critically about serving as Jesus served. The purpose is to examine what Scripture says about discipleship as it relates to humility and then parlay that lesson into a concept for local missional outreach that involves serving those in need. The concepts above will be explored, and the youth will come away with some concrete, group-led ideas on ways the group can both serve and engage with people in their city, sharing God's love in the spirit of humility and community. This concept was birthed after stepping into the leadership of a group that verbalized a desire to participate in "mission and service," but whose ongoing service and outreach activities involved no interaction with actual recipients and very little education and/or theological reflection.

Intended Participants

This resource is intended for youth participants or churches near or within an urban setting, where youth are familiar with the landscape, areas of need, and idiosyncrasies of the area.

¹ See, for example, Lupton, Robert, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, and How to Reverse It* (New York: Harper One, 2011).

² Wells, Samuel, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015). See also, Michalove, Robin. "When Helping Hurts." Workshop Presentation at Association of Presbyterian Church Educators, Denver, CO, January 29, 2017.

Participants will be physically moving about the community, and proximity to various sites is important. The resource can be used at an offsite, urban retreat site such as *The Center*, (<http://www.thecenterbaltimore.org/>), or onsite at the church as long as participants can get out into the community. Use of the guide in a more suburban or rural setting will require some adjustments to planned activities.

As you plan for your retreat, consider your congregation's current mission/outreach programs and events. Do the youth regularly participate? Consider whether these programs or events generally involve the collection of material goods. How are the goods shared or distributed? Do the youth engage with the recipients? Is there a shared story? It is also important to think about how these programs or events fit into the scope of Christian Formation in your context. What type of education is offered to participants as part of the congregational or youth-focused mission/outreach?

What's Currently Missing?

Consider the example of Sheila, a busy high school sophomore who plays sports and is active in the school choir program. She regularly attends the affluent, suburban church down the street from her high school, just outside of Baltimore, on Sunday mornings. Though a separate Sunday school class is not offered to youth on Sunday mornings, she is active in the church youth group on Sunday evenings and has many friends in the group. She has demonstrated a consistent desire to take part in events with her church family. Sheila recently participated in the canned food drive hosted by her church, but she cannot remember which organization received the food. The drive was announced during the worship service and posted in the bulletin, but the bulletin did not give an address for distribution of the collected food. Sheila donated canned goods outside of the sanctuary, because she wanted to give to those in need. Now that the canned food drive is over, she will look for an announcement for the winter mitten drive next season.

Sheila is unaware that the recipients of these goods live a short, ten minute drive from her suburban setting. Some of the recipients of those canned goods have encountered difficult life circumstances and have dealt with any of a number of issues: crime, drug addiction, prostitution, domestic violence, unemployment, *etc.* Sheila has never met someone who has faced these particular issues. The recipients (young and old) of the canned goods know that the church has provided the donation. However, they have never spoken to Sheila or her friends, despite their proximity.

Sheila's example shows good intention, but reveals a lack of human interaction. Too often we limit youth mission/outreach project involvement to food or clothing collections for drop off to a distribution center, but there is no interaction with actual people. One goal of this retreat design is to engage youth in rethinking how they "give" to the poor, and how they might expand to include those to whom they "give" within their concept of community.

Content

This design incorporates a study of Luke 14:7-14. As you work through the parable of the wedding feast together, highlight its points about humility and generosity. In this illustration, the concept of *who* sits in the seat of honor is turned upside-down, as well as *who else* should be included at the table. Take some time to examine how the social context of this first century Lukan community relates to the social structure within your own urban community today. What are the similarities and/or differences? How do the concepts in this word picture of a wedding feast impact your group's vision of "giving to the poor"?

The retreat design also entails a close look at neighborhoods and specific areas of need that exist next door. The dual study of the Biblical wedding feast and contemporary neighborhoods within close proximity correlate with the goal to engage youth in planning a different type of local mission project or event. Sessions include small group and large group discussion, media clips, lunch at a community soup kitchen, a city/community scavenger hunt, and a group research project related to planning of a future missional event(s). Games, snacks, and social breaks are included to foster community within the youth group itself.

Teaching Strategies

Much thought was given to organizing this retreat curriculum around a problem for which the youth themselves must carry out active research. Recent research has shown that providing ample opportunity for student collaboration and problem-solving provides motivation. Youth are curious, inquisitive, skeptical, creative, and observant learners. The challenge given to the youth in this curriculum design is to rethink how they engage in mission/outreach given the concepts gleaned from the Biblical study and the information they *discover* about their community. The youth serve as detectives and solution-makers at this event.³ Using a problem-solving and collaborative approach encourages the expression and generation of meaning. The youth should grapple with the Biblical text, research their own community, and work on putting together a plan for a future youth mission/outreach event.

Student-led problem solving does not equate to the elimination of a teaching component. However, the teaching component in this curriculum design is set up to intentionally establish intergenerational connections. It involves an invitation to the church Mission Ministry to share with the group and participate in some of the activities. By having adults share about those outreach activities for which they are most passionate, youth will have an opportunity to identify adults with similar interests. Pair up some of these adults with the youth for the outside activities. It is important to provide opportunities for youth to engage with some of the congregants who may be more mature in their faith, so as to provide a means by which the youth might seek out spiritual mentors.

We were made for relationship. Each of us longs to connect deeply, with God and with others. Some experts suggest there is a societal cry for spiritual mothers and fathers today, and they often point to a lack of effort by more mature Christians to establish mentoring relationships or opportunities. Despite difficulties found in structured programs, the benefits of mentoring should encourage us to at least explore various models and work to create a mentoring culture.

³ See Jacobs, Heidi Hayes, *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2010 (41-45). Jacobs bases this curriculum research on recent breakthroughs in the science fields.

Churches can only be as effective as the relational ties that the church members feel with each other, and people are simply too valuable for the church to forego encouraging relationships which are both intentional and focused.⁴ For this reason, it is suggested that a follow-up activity be planned during which those adults serving on the Mission Ministry can interact again with the youth after the retreat. Plan a dinner or fellowship time during which both can share what happened during the retreat. What was discovered/learned? How can lessons learned be put into action in the future? Make an effort to keep your Missions Ministry engaged by asking for their evaluation of the event and encouraging them to continue building upon these new relationships.

Learning Styles

This resource provides activities for a variety of learning styles, including the following:

- Visual/musical (media/video clips of local city sites and interview at a NYC soup kitchen);
- Physical-kinesthetic (City Photo Scavenger Hunt, group meal);
- Intrapersonal (introspection);
- Interpersonal/Cooperative (group research/problem-solving, small group/large group discussions); and
- Linguistic/Verbal (discussion questions and reading/study of text).

In addition, specific attention is given to the insertion of some open space for fun and social interaction within the scope of the day-long retreat. Though technology is not the centerpiece of this design (this event is not intended to be an online resource), participants will utilize several online resources for planning and problem-solving.

⁴ Larry Kreider argues that intentional encouragement of mentorship relationships is missing in most church programming today: “[I]nstead of developing deep and nurturing relationships with spiritual parents, today’s believers are encouraged to participate in church services, Bible studies, para-church organizations, or ministries to bolster faith.” Kreider, Larry. *The Cry for Spiritual Mothers and Fathers: The Next Generation Needs You to Be a Spiritual Mentor*. Ventura, CA: Regal Publications, 1984, 22.

YOUTH Missional Outreach Planning Retreat

One-Day Retreat: Age Group: High School Youth Group

Purpose: The purpose of this retreat is to examine what Scripture says about discipleship as it relates to humility and to parlay that lesson into a concept for missional outreach that involves serving those in need.

Objectives: Students will evaluate previous youth outreach events, consider what lessons can be learned from Luke’s depiction of the wedding feast and how this might change/impact design for group’s future missional outreach. The goal is to come away with some concrete, group-led ideas on ways group can both serve and engage with people in their city, sharing God’s love in the spirit of humility and community.

Location: This retreat is planned for an urban setting, but can be adapted with certain activity adjustments for a more suburban setting.

Teaching Strategy	Instructions	Materials Needed	Suggested Time
FIRST HOUR			
Ice-Breaker Opening Game: Goal to mix up Seating of Youth Learning Style: Physical	Leader observes how participants are seated (Youth tend to sit with close friends); Note whether any youth appear to be solo participants or separated from group); Play “If You” Game: Everyone sits in circle, but there is one less chair than number of players. Announce the “If You” statement, and everyone who has done what the statement describes must find new seat (sometimes the statement gets entire group to move).	Sample “If You” Statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have ever broken a bone • If you know Psalm 23 by heart • If you have every eaten rocky road ice cream • <i>Etc.</i> 	15 minutes
Opening Video Clip Learning Style: Visual/Auditory, Media	Prior to showing video, ask group to define a “soup kitchen.” What is it? What does it look like? Who is there? Show NYT Video Clip of Soup Kitchen in NYC:	Computer/ Projector	15 min

	<p>https://www.nytimes.com/video/nyregion/10000003332771/the-soup-and-soul-kitchen.html⁵</p> <p>Discussion Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some things that were different in this soup kitchen compared to your previous image of a soup kitchen? • What was the environment like? • How were “the poor” different from what you might have imagined? 		
<p>Second Video Clip: Media or Visual Illustration</p> <p>Learning Style: Visual; Use of Media</p>	<p>Use Media Clip or Slide Show (photos) to show some images of typical, contemporary Wedding and Social Banquets (perhaps HS awards ceremony dinners);</p> <p>Also photos/images of Brokenness in Community (Poverty)</p>	<p>Media clip/slides; Computer; Projector</p>	<p>2 minutes</p>
<p>Introspection</p> <p>Learning Style: Written/Introspective</p>	<p>Have youth take a moment to write down at least two things that came to mind when they saw these slides/video (draw a picture, write some key words, write about a personal experience. <i>Say:</i> “Take some time to think about how you personally interacted with these photos”)</p>	<p>Paper, Colored Pencils, or Pens</p>	<p>8 minutes</p>
<p>Introduce Plan for Remainder of the Day and Pray</p>	<p>Outline Rest of the Day: Provide youth an outline of the day’s upcoming segments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible Study: We will take a look at some passages in Scripture that relate to this discussion • We will do an inventory (research involved) of some ongoing projects in our community that already attempt to address what we have discussed • We will undertake an excursion into the community to have lunch with some of our neighbors • We will evaluate current youth group 		<p>10 minutes</p>

⁵ Farrell, Stephen, “The Soul and Soup Kitchen”, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/nyregion/10000003332771/the-soup-and-soul-kitchen.html>, New York Times Company, Dec. 29, 2014. This video clip show a soup kitchen in New York City which has a dramatically different atmosphere than most. Boasting a grand piano and regular appearances from Broadway music stars, regular attendees often jump into the act and participate with Broadway visitors in making music together.

	<p>outreach and “brainstorm” about a project or event for this season/year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will mix in some games, snacks, and fun! • Questions about the Day? • Prayer for the Day 		
Break	Snacks/Hot Cocoa/etc.	<i>Snacks & Beverages</i>	10 min
SECOND HOUR			
<p>Bible Study:</p> <p>Learning Style: Reading; Verbal</p>	<p>Examination of text: Luke 14:7-14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read text together • Provide context and Background (social matrix of first century; food theme; imagery of Eucharistic Banquet); • Key Concepts – humility and generosity • Discussion Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Why shouldn't you sit in seat of honor? -What might happen if you sit in worst seat? -What “attitude does this passage call for? -Why do you think Jesus told this parable? -Where are the “poor/disadvantaged” in this story? 	Bibles; Flip Chart to write down Youth's Observations	15 min
<p>Connections/ Application:</p> <p>Learning Style: Cooperative/Team-Building; Visual/Technology</p>	<p>Discussion about applying this to an outreach activity within our own community:</p> <p>Research time! Break into groups and research current programs that exist in your community (using phones, computers if avail, community resources/magazines)</p>	Cell Phones, Computers, Community Resources Magazines	20 min
<p>Connections Cont'd:</p> <p>Whole Group Discussion</p> <p>Learning Style: Verbal Interpersonal</p>	<p>Invite church mission ministry to join in this discussion. Have youth share what they've found and comment on what program looks like in light of Scripture passage;</p> <p>Have Missions Ministry members share what they do in their community and through their ministry; consider in light of the Scripture and youth comments</p>		25 min

THIRD HOUR			
LUNCH AT LOCAL NON-PROFIT Learning Style: Cooperative, Physical	Entire group will walk to local non-profit (urban setting) to serve and then eat with those who come for free meal/assistance	Coordinate with a Local Non-profit ahead of time	60 min
FOURTH HOUR			
Community Photo Scavenger Hunt: Learning style: Physical	Get to know your city/community! Break group into new smaller teams chaperoned by one of the Missions Ministry members; provide list of community (city) items that teams have to spot (and take photo)	Team Scavenger Hunt Lists (Should be intentionally designed to include city landmarks but also provide a glimpse of “illustrations of poor, or those in need”); Cell Phones or Other Camera (at least one per group)	60 min
FIFTH HOUR			
Regroup Video Clip and Discussion Learning Style: Verbal Emphasis on Larger Community	Have youth share what they found/saw in their own city; Share what others have done in other cities/communities, Example: <i>FCS</i> in Atlanta Show video clip which discusses <i>Shalom</i> (God’s Peace) – represents God’s vision of health, wholeness and hope for community	Notes, FCS materials (Focused Community Strategies) http://www.fcsministries.org/blog/2016/9/2/introducing-our-interactive-e	15 minutes

	<p>Discussion Questions (invite sharing):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where have you glimpsed Shalom? (family, church, neighborhood, a restored relationship, <i>etc.</i>?) • FCS’s work considers which roadblocks that might prevent shalom in their community? • What might prevent Shalom in the world? 	course-seeking-shalom ⁶	
Quick Mixer Game to get into new groups!	<p>Game to Form New Groups: “Looking For…” Game from <i>On the Spot Games</i> (Group Publishing):</p> <p>Leader will call out categories and youth are given 20 seconds or less to join with others who fit same description; Examples include: same hair color, same birthday month, watched same TV show last night, same favorite class subject, <i>etc.</i></p>		10 min
<p>Brainstorming Session:</p> <p>Learning style: Cooperative, Verbal, Problem-Solving; Global Outlook</p>	<p>In new teams (established by mixer game), begin brainstorming session about a new Youth Group Event or Long-term Project for the group that incorporates what has been learned about <i>Shalom</i>, humility, generosity, and community;</p> <p>Things to keep in mind: How have other communities done this? How can our church Missions Ministry act as a resource for us? Do we have any new ideas not represented by the programs already in place?</p>	Paper, Pens, Access to Internet and Community Resources	25 min
SIXTH HOUR			
Break	Snack/Social Time	Snacks & Beverages	20 min
<p>Whole Group Debrief</p> <p>Learning Style: Verbal, Visual</p>	<p>Invite groups to present their ideas for future youth-led outreach;</p> <p>Discuss whether suggestions applicable to intergenerational event (youth-led, but for</p>	Computer and Projector	20 min

⁶ *Seeking Shalom* is a video resource provided by Focused Community Strategies (FCS), www.fcsministries.org, 2016.

	whole church?) or just Youth Group; Invite youth to share any photos/videos they found online in their research		
Wrap-up	Closing Thoughts; Announce plans for Follow Up Session with the Missions Ministry back at the Church; Open the floor to any follow-up study/discussion questions		10 min
Closing Prayer	Whole Group Pop Corn Prayer		10 min

Resources

- Materials Needed for Leader Content: Bibles, Images of City/Community, Images Gathered to represent contemporary wedding and other banquet feasts.
- Materials Needed for Small-Group Led Research Activity: Cellphones, access to the Internet for Pinterest Sites, Nonprofit Sites, Community information, Community Resource Magazines and Brochures.
- Materials Needed for Games and Social Time: Food! And Chairs, Cameras/Cellphones for Scavenger Hunt.
- Focused Community Strategies (FCS), “Seeking Shalom” video resource, www.fcsministries.org, 2016.
- Farrell, Stephen, “The Soul and Soup Kitchen”, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/nyregion/100000003332771/the-soup-and-soul-kitchen.html>, New York Times Company, Dec. 29, 2014.
- Lupton, Robert D., *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, and How to Reverse It* (New York: Harper One, 2011).
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- Michalove, Robin. “When Helping Hurts.” Workshop Presentation at Association of Presbyterian Church Educators, Denver, CO, January 29, 2017.

Youth Retreat Evaluation

1. Please check the answer that completes this sentence: I attended the Youth Retreat as a ...

- Youth Participant
- Missions Ministry Representative
- Youth Leader/Chaperone

2. List one thing you liked about one or more of the retreat segments:

3. List one thing you learned during the retreat:

4. List something you would like to see changed for the next Youth Retreat:

5. Do you plan to participate in the follow-up joint Missions Ministry/Youth event? Why or Why Not?

6. What faith topic would you like to see covered at future retreats?

Other Comments:

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