



Ideas to Serve Your Community

Many youth groups begin serving by setting aside a few hours each month for service. This may be a group meeting on Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning, or a designated time after school. These servant event ideas focus on the needs of the neighborhood or community near your church. Use these ideas to get you started. Try them throughout the year with your youth group. Also, consider inviting other congregants and families to join in with your youth ministry.

Coat/Mitten/Cap/Scarf Collection

Check your closet and drawers or contact local stores to gather a collection of coats, mittens, caps, and scarves. These items can be donated to an agency such as Lutheran Children's and Family Services or to nearby churches who care for those struggling with homelessness. Invite someone from your church that can crochet or knit to teach the youth this skill and create scarves or caps to donate.

Valentine Caroling

Christmas caroling offers a pleasant surprise for those served by such festive songs. You may cause an even bigger surprise if you carol when it is not Christmas. Practice an assortment of familiar Christian songs that share the messages of God's love and grace such as "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know"; "Beautiful Savior"; "God Loves Me Dearly" or others. On the weekend nearest Valentine's Day visit a local retirement home and share your gift of music.

Tray Cards for Nursing Home

Fold blank 5" x 7" index cards lengthwise to create a tray card. Look for Scripture verses that provide words of encouragement and thanksgiving. Print the verses on the cards using a fine tip marker. Add other decorations to the cards using crayons, markers, sequins, ribbons, etc. Deliver the cards to the activity director or other staff of a local nursing home to place on meal trays being delivered to residents' rooms.

Baby Shower

In local homeless shelters, social service agencies or hospitals, gifts of layettes convey a warm welcome to newborns and are gratefully received by mothers. Invite your youth group and members of your congregation to donate items for baby layettes. A completed layette may include two shirts; two gowns, sleepers, or onesies; two receiving blankets; four cloth diapers; one sweater; two washcloths; one bath-size bar of soap and two diaper pins.

T-shirt or Underwear Drive

Discuss with youth the fact that we have so many blessings—many that we don't even use. Have youth sponsor a T-shirt or underwear drive and set out collections boxes where people can donate clean, used T-shirts they no longer want or new packs of underwear. Emphasize that these are universally useful and enjoyed. Youth can organize the items after the drive and distribute them to a local shelter or relief agency.

Adopt-A-Highway

Improve the anti-litter and highway beautification efforts of your state by having your group participate in an adopt-a-highway program in your community. Contact your state's Department of Transportation for more information.

Canned Food Collection

Food pantries often experience low inventory during the summer months. Conduct a food drive within your congregation for a local food pantry. Gather an assortment of empty plastic grocery bags to distribute with a suggested shopping list attached. Give these to members on two Sundays prior to the official closing of your food drive. Deliver the items to the food pantry and volunteer to stay and help stock the shelves with the food items you have donated.

School Supplies

Contact your local school district to determine a local school that would welcome your school supply donation. Ask them for specific items that might be useful. Invite congregational or youth group members to collect a variety of school supplies including notebooks, pencils, pens, crayons, etc.

Game Time at Retirement Center

Gather a collection of board and card games such as checkers, Uno, Bananagrams and others. In coordination with the activity director at a local retirement center, arrange a time for your group to come and spend time playing these games with the residents. Your group may also want to provide refreshments to share during the activity.

Thanksgiving Baskets

Contact a local community social service agency to discover the name of someone in your community who could benefit from a thanksgiving basket. Include in your basket all the items needed for a traditional Thanksgiving dinner such as cranberry sauce, stuffing mix, pumpkin pie ingredients, rolls, vegetables, and a frozen turkey or grocery gift certificate. Your basket may also include items the recipient can use to decorate their thanksgiving table such as festive paper napkins, small pumpkins, gourds and ornamental corn.

Birthday Party Boxes

We celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas. Help needy children celebrate their birthdays by assembling supplies children might like to have at a birthday party: cake mix, frosting, candles, napkins, paper party plates, and party decorations. Include enough supplies for one party for six to eight children. Place the items in a box with a lid such as a large shoebox. Wrap the box and lid separately with birthday wrap so the child can lift the lid and see the contents of the box. Deliver boxes to a local food pantry or other social service agency for distribution to families in need. Consider including something in the box that will deliver a simple spiritual message such as *My Happy Birthday Book* available from Concordia Publishing House. Pray for the children who will receive the box. Pray that they will enjoy it, know that other people care for them, and above all, that they will know that God cares so much for them He sent His Son to be their Savior.