

SERVICE PROJECT TIPS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Here are 10 quick tips to think about in planning a service project for your small group. These tips are offered by Diane Betterley and other small group leaders.

Begin Planning Early – It can take advance preparation to find a site that works with the time availability of your group members. Some sites may even have a waiting list. This is all in addition to the complex schedules of your group members!

Check Out Interests – Your group members may already be connected to volunteer opportunities. Serving will be even more meaningful if you select something members are passionate about. You can offer several different options as examples to select from as a group. Check out the types of projects they would prefer—working with people or with things, outdoor work or indoor work, types of people to work with (ages and stages of life), issues they care about, etc.

Ask about Time Availability – Does the group want to serve during the time it typically meets or at another time. How much time would they like to spend (a couple of hours, a morning or evening, all day...) Settle on some actual dates to check out. Ask whether your group wants to do this instead of their regular group meeting or if they still want to gather for the regular purpose of the group.

Look for Projects with Group Interaction – Try for something where you get to stay together as a group (or at least work in pairs) rather than being separated and doing different things in different places. This will give your group more opportunities for informal conversation.

Make Serving More Comfortable – For some, serving can be an adventure into the unknown, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable. Remember that group members didn't sign up for a service project, but for a small group. So, look for something that everyone seems comfortable doing. You want this to be a good experience so they might return again or move on to a more challenging service project. Check out and consider any health issues that might influence where you serve. Give members information sheets on the service site or the web address so they can learn about the mission of the organization or ask the volunteer coordinator at the site for information.

Arrange for Transportation – Car pooling gives you time to connect with one another along the way and time to debrief on the way home (valuable time!). It makes the experience easier and more comfortable for group members. Provide maps with the site location's phone number and directions. Give information on parking and the amount of time needed for travel.

Ask about Opportunities (or Expectations) for Donations – A service site may accept contributions – financial or "goods" (i.e. clothes, groceries, books, etc.). You can ask the

volunteer coordinator and provide this option to your group, but make sure no one feels obligated to contribute. Some sites may request that you cover costs (i.e. food for a meal that you will serve). Be sure to find out ahead of time.

The Incarnation Faith Community – There are many opportunities to serve at Incarnation. Check out the website at www.incarnationmn.org. There may also be members of the Incarnation community going through a difficult time who could use some extra help, perhaps a meal or a visit. If your group is interested in serving a person in need, contact the Incarnation office.

Include a Devotion and a Prayer – Service opportunities can be meaningful times to join together in a devotion and prayer. Ask for ideas that might work for your group or use a “service project session” from one of the *Connecting in Grace* faith studies. A devotion and prayer can help to set the context for serving in ministry and remind us that we are extending God’s love to others.

Try for a Time When Everyone Can Be There – If someone is missing, they will miss an important stage with your group. Do the best you can to find a time when everyone might be able to attend, keeping in mind the schedule challenges!

From the *Service Project Guidebook* for *Connecting in Grace* faith studies