



# Elements of an Intergenerational Mission Trip

Each experience will be rich if we are God's disciples together, and the following four elements are included: (1) Mission and Service, (2) Education and Learning, (3) Worship and Reflection, and (4) Community and Fellowship. As you plan, build these four elements into the preparation meeting, along with each day of the experience and your follow-up reunion. Your experience might be overnight or three to four days. It might be local event, a five-hour drive or a plane ride away.

## **(1) Mission and Service**

What makes this experience and program different from others is the focus on mission and service in an intergenerational setting. This will include physically doing work for an agency or organization, but make sure it is work on their terms for their needs. You can provide information on what skills your team possesses, but work alongside the leadership and take their lead. In addition, it is hopeful the experience can be planned to include conversations and interaction with staff, other volunteers and clients/participants/guests.

- Choose a variety of types of organizations so that your team has different experiences, uses different skills and appeals to different members. Perhaps try a food pantry, clothes closet, homeless shelter, community garden/farm, domestic violence shelter, retirement center or day camp/child care.
- Choose at least one agency that is similar to a place in your community that your church supports so that you can learn from them and compare it with. You can go home and volunteer at the similar place at home. Interesting conversations can come about around food deserts in inner-city Dallas and rural Oklahoma, for instance.
- Choose at least one agency that is different from your community or meets other needs to increase the knowledge and learnings for all ages.
- Plan for varied work projects. For example, clean and organize with one agency, play games and do crafts at another, followed by painting and landscaping, and then make sandwiches.

## **(2) Education and Learning**

The service-based learning model and an intergenerational mission trip provide the opportunity to learn using multiple intelligences. The team has time in preparation to study issues, hands-on experiences during the trip, conversation with agency leaders, reflection through art and music, and moments to listen to the experiences and stories across generations.

- Plan to have the agencies give your team a tour and explain the programs offered, and then create questions for conversation with the team to compare and reflect on how there are similar needs in your community. Name places your church partners with.
- Look for agencies and organizations in the area you choose that may or may not have a service opportunity, particularly that you could learn from, and have a hands-on or role-playing experience. For example, consider Heifer Ranch or Heifer International Headquarters, World Relief Hunger Farm or Habitat for Humanity.
- Provide information before the trip to both the team and congregation about the agencies you are partnering with.
- Find resources and plan for time each day as a team (all generations together or in family pods) to learn about the justice issues raised by the needs being met with the agencies like housing, food insecurity, education, child care, health care stewardship of the environment and so forth. (A separate resource document in this toolkit provides books and websites to assist in planning.)
- Ask wondering questions of the team and provide activities for reflection. For instance, as a family, create a week's worth of meals using the list of items provided by the food pantry you served that day and then ask what is missing. Or the team could look at photos of people and reflect on what their back story might be and what they need.



- Learn about the community you are serving and share statistics, needs and comparisons to your community.
- Find a unique educational experience beyond the organizations you are serving with. Visit a national park. Learn about an important historical justice issue or a geological phenomenon.
- Share children's books, which tell the stories of homelessness, hunger, foster care, earth stewardship or retell Bible stories that relate to the themes of the trip.
- When possible, invite local faith leaders and/or agency staff to share their personal stories. Some of these experiences can be incorporated into evening worship and reflection time.

### **(3) Worship and Reflection**

An Intergenerational Mission Trip offers what is often a unique chance for the generations to worship and reflect together. The team can be involved in creating and leading worship. These will be times to make connections between what we see, what we do and who we are as God's disciples.

- Plan an evening time of reflection and worship. You can create a short evening prayer service and ask team members of all ages to participate in leadership. Include some education and learning exercises based on the mission of the day.
- Choose Scriptures for each day that relate to the faith and justice issue you are seeing.
- Provide a few moments for team members to share highs and lows or where they saw God at work during the day.
- Provide a time for family/household journaling. Have families/pods create a simple journal and then use prompts to promote discussion and reflection. Perhaps write an acrostic poem with the word "hunger" or "hope," or trace their hands or feet the last night and write down ways they will continue together to be God's hands and feet.
- Plan a short prayer and devotion for each morning.
- Pray together at meals, giving all a chance to share and lead family ones.
- Plan a Sunday creative worship experience and include communion if you have permission and appropriate leadership.
- Sing together.

### **(4) Community and Fellowship**

Community living is key to this experience. There are opportunities to worship together, learn together, fellowship together and serve together across generations during one-off events or classes. But living in community where you eat, sleep, wash dishes, share bathrooms and do all the other things together means learning to share, to work together, to build deepened relationships.

- Live in community for the trip by preparing meals, eating and cleaning up together. Bonds are built over making pigs in a blanket for breakfast at 7 a.m. and while washing or drying dishes.
- Play together, whether basketball or board games, learning chess or making friendship bracelets. Build in free play and rest time and recognize some flexibility in bedtime differences for different ages.
- Turn experiences into positive memories: invasion of the millipedes, digging postholes, cooking with a George Forman grill, unpacking in the rain or helping the person who walks in their sleep.
- Mix up the ages and families for work assignments and have people sign up for meal prep and clean up.
- Plan some intentional group building activities at the beginning and then watch what happens organically.
- Create a covenant of expectations together before the trip. Include an expectation of limited screen use to travel time and photographing, and instead promote face-to-face interacting.
- Have the group write personal thank you notes to all the individuals and classes who contributed to your trip.
- Find some fun places to play together as a team: at the park for a picnic, at the pool, picking blueberries or eating local ice cream.



- Take time to ask questions and listen to those you serve, whether they are homeless clients, foster children or agency staff.
- Plan a reunion potluck and swim party after the trip.

Writer: Miatta Wilson

Office of Christian Formation: <https://pcusa.org/formation>

July 2021

