



Mission and Service Gatherings for the Whole Church

One way to begin intergenerational mission in your church is to have regular gatherings on-site where service learning or a project can take place that is appropriate for all ages. This is a way to engage in your local community partnerships, as well as explore partnerships that you have further away or even around the world. Consider adding an all church mission gathering before or after a small group goes on a trip so that everyone can be involved even if they don't travel.

What do you do for these types of service experiences?

Collecting supplies for an organization and putting them together is always a good activity for this sort of gathering. The creativity comes in the packaging of the supplies and the personal touches you can add from all ages. Think about cards, drawings and words of encouragement that smaller children can contribute.

Your gathering doesn't always have to include a collection and assembly line. Keep one goal in mind, which is to engage all ages in your mission partnerships. This can mean games, creative presentations and hearing stories of impact from the organizations. Gathering all ages together also means that you are cultivating relationships across generations. Our youngest members may not understand all the content being presented but they do understand that they are with their church family and that their community cares for others.

Planning

- The more people are involved, the better! Consider all the components and have a variety of leadership opportunities.
- Consider planning these experiences around a meal. It does not need to be elaborate and can even be a potluck or a meal provided by a particular group of the church. Try and keep the experience to 90 minutes total, including gathering time and the meal.
- Communication and getting the word out are important! Make sure the congregation knows this is a “whole church” experience.
- If your project is going to involve supplies, get the word out early so people can shop. Putting out a shopping list for several months at one time encourages the entire congregation to shop even if they can't attend a gathering. Have a visible collection box or consider an Amazon wish list and allow shipping to the church directly.

Setting the table

- Round tables are often the best way to encourage conversations and small groups.
- Keep children in mind when deciding what goes on the tables. Centerpieces aren't as important as things to keep little hands busy: crayons, washable markers and large coloring placemats, or just cover the tables with butcher paper. You might even have some play dough if carpet isn't a concern.
- Each table should have a captain. Someone that knows the plan of the gathering and is prepared to lead the table.
- Table tent instructions will vary by gathering but have instructions on a table tent for an ice breaker as people sit down. Include who will offer a table grace and maybe some meal conversation starters. Pay attention to the ages of the participants and specifically consider including the “youngest” at the table with instructions that include drawing on the paper or creating with the playdough — or even an action item (like pouring water for everyone).



Gather together

- Have greeters for your gathering that will help participants choose a table. Consider ways to ensure a variety of ages at each table. You could have colored dot stickers for each generation (boomers, Gen X, millennials, etc.) and ask for there to be 3 or 4 colors at each table. Send young children with at least one parent or family member but older elementary children and teens could get a lot out of sitting on their own with others.
- The table captain will help participants get settled and start right away on the table-tent instructions. This would include beginning the meal. Table graces are effective and keep things moving.

Introducing the mission experience

- This part of the experience is best done with a leader up-front.
- Start with an energizer, song or quick group game to bring people together.
- Have a short Scripture that relates to your mission experience.
- Consider having a particular word for the gathering (refugee, advocate, hope, welcome, compassion, etc.) and be creative in displaying the word.
- Introduce the organization and talk about why the church partners with them or is supportive of their work. Having a representative is a great idea but that person should be aware of the variety of ages present and keep an intro short and interesting. More in-depth information can be offered with written materials or questions afterwards.
- Hands-on projects or learning activities are typically done at tables. Have instructions for getting pre-made kits for the tables passed out or instructions for doing a learning activity.
- Beyond assembling the supplies, make sure you are including education about the organization. How you talk about what you are doing is important. Avoid words and phrases such as “help” and “those that are less fortunate.” Instead, focus on the work that the organization is doing and how you are partnering with them.

Sending out and closing

- Bring everyone back together as soon as projects are completed with a song or quick energizer.
- Conclude with an active prayer, blessing for the project and/or a group benediction.

Follow-up

- If the project needs to be delivered, ask for different volunteers each time to take on this task. Make sure to give clear instructions for the delivery and a time frame.
- Report on the gathering in the church bulletins, newsletters, website and social media.
- Stories are important. Consider having a story periodically in worship about these gatherings. Pair up unrelated participants of different generations to talk about the experience of learning and serving together. Producing a template helps this time be meaningful and stick to the time allotted.
- Consider producing a short handout for each gathering. It can have more information about the organization, ways to stay involved on their own and a preview of the next gathering with upcoming shopping lists.

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