

## Resources for Service and Mission

In 1990, Search Institute released *Effective Christian Education*, a national study of 560 congregations in six denominations. In the area of 'service' it was discovered that the more time youth give in service to the community through the congregation, the greater the loyalty and bonding to the church. Similar patterns emerged when young people indicated the likelihood that they would be active in church as adults. Finally, young people who were most active in service throughout their congregations were almost twice as likely to say, "It is very important to me to belong to a church," when compared to those who had been involved in no service. Service is an important vehicle for nurturing loyalty. Bonds among those who serve side-by-side also keep young people active because of their shared experience and the relationships that form through the service.

- All the following aspects of a Christian education program for youth which nurtures growth in faith (as measured in the *Effective Christian Education* study) are integral to a service-learning model:
- Emphasizes intergenerational contact
- Uses life experience as occasion for spiritual insight
- *Creates a sense of community in which people help one another develop faith and values*
- Encourages independent thinking and questioning
- Involves youth in service projects
- Emphasizes values and moral decision making
- Emphasizes responsibility for poverty and hunger
- Teaches the Bible and core theological concepts (which service-learning does through preparation and debriefing)
- Teaches youth how to be friends and make friends
- Helps youth develop concern for other people.

Using understandings of adolescent development, these types of service projects are appropriate:

*For grades 6-8 (Middle school):*

- Planting trees in a park
- Setting up a recycling program
- Helping a family move
- Collecting food for a food pantry
- Helping in a homeless shelter
- Tutoring younger children
- Visiting nursing homes
- Being peer ministers

*For grades 9-12 (high school)*

- Designing and conducting a campaign to educate others about the environment

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- Writing letters to Congress or city officials
- Organizing a product boycott
- Educating adults about racism
- Teaming with adults to build or renovate a home
- Tutoring younger children
- Assisting at an after-school program