

Before Serving Together

Some things to do in preparation.

FIND A SHARED PASSION:

Spend some time talking with your child/teenager about the things that interest and concern them. It will be more meaningful if you have a shared passion for the specific area of service. (Examples: If your family has an interest in poverty-stricken areas, find a place to feed the homeless. You may have a teenager that loves kids and it would be great to serve in an orphanage or at the church with the children's or special needs ministry.)

FIND A GOOD FIT:

Serving can be as simple as baking cookies for a homebound neighbor or making birthday cards for those in a nursing home. It can be an extended serving time such as a missions trip or meeting a particular need on a regular basis. Keep in mind, there are often great projects and scheduled mission events already planned that your family may want to take part in. (For ideas pick up a HomeLife Personal Plan for St. Michael's events or stmichaels-westend.org) It is important for the kids to participate in the selection process. Share a short list of pre-screened opportunities with them and ask each to make a case for which they would like to do and why. If you can't select just one, schedule several over the coming months. Think through each of the following questions as you consider serving options for your family...

1. Skills:

What are the skills, strengths and talents of each family member that might influence your choice of where you serve?

2. Learning:

What kinds of things would your family like to learn from volunteering?

3. Logistics:

What are the best times and locations for your family to volunteer?

SET EXPECTATIONS:

Put your child more at ease by explaining what to expect. If visiting a nursing home, for example, explain they may encounter odd sights, sounds and smells. If feeding the homeless, share why some people may not be able to take regular baths but we love them anyway. If helping children with special needs, explain why some can't respond "normally" to conversations, etc. You may also want to coach them on manners and explain what they will likely do while serving. Set the tone for a great time together!

While Serving Together

Some things to keep in mind during your family service project.

BUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIPS:

Serving together is an ideal time to get to know each other better. Take note of what different family members do well. Intentionally encourage them and tell them you are proud of how they demonstrated a great attitude or area of strength.

GO DEEPER:

Work as a family to really invest in others' lives. Spend some time learning the names of those you serve. Look them in the eyes and find out their interests and their story. Allow those you serve to learn about your family. This will allow your children to see those you are serving as valued individuals and possibly similar to your own family. This may also create great conversations later with your child.

BE SAFE:

While it is great to serve together and try new things, it's just as important to make sure that you are not putting anyone in your family in a risky situation. Keep a close eye on one another, especially children/teenagers. You might want to make sure that you are working directly with each other or that you can see your child at all times.

SERVING WITH YOUR SPOUSE...

- Helps create intimacy
- Allows you to learn more about one another
- Provides opportunities for greater communication
- Models meaningful partnership

Serving  Together
To Build a Stronger Family

After Serving Together

Some things to do afterwards to get the most out of your experience.

TALK ABOUT IT:

Take time right after you finish serving to talk about your family volunteer experiences. By reflecting and talking about it, the experience will have a greater impact and allow family members to share what really meant a lot to them, moved or challenged them. This is a great way to get to know each other better.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be helpful to guide conversation when you finish your time of serving together:

What?

What kind of difference did we make together?

Allow each member to share any stories about the experience. They can be sad, silly, frustrating, funny or serious and touching stories.

Why?

Why was it important to do this project together as a family?

How did it fit with the values and beliefs that are important to your family?

How did it impact you?

Now what?

Is there anything that you will do differently as a family as a result of your time serving together?

How did it impact your entire family?

What kinds of activities do you want to do in the future?

PRAY FOR THOSE SERVED:

Take a few minutes to pray as a family asking God to bless those you served by using your act of service to bring hope, healing and grace into their lives.