

7 Gifts

for church & home

Summary Gift Seven

Serve together in
service and mission

INFORMATION & DISCUSSION GUIDE

Why service is important

The research is clear that service and faith development are inextricably linked. Service appears to be more powerful than Sabbath School, Bible study, or participation in worship in the faith development of children.

“As families serve together, they gain a deeper understanding of one another and God. They find their faith more resilient and meaningful. Their children develop a faith that helps them stick to the church and to their beliefs into young adulthood.” (See Diana Garland, *Inside Out Families*, 2011)

Ivy Beckwith says that “If we think that cloistering our children in a Christian ghetto will make them into God’s people we are sorely mistaken. But by being a community that models concern and care for the rest of the world and by involving our children in that care and concern, we can help our children become people of faith.” (Postmodern Children’s Ministries 2004)

Beckwith and Csinos say that “When children and their families as a way of life are involved in the practices of practicing generosity, addressing the “isms” (racism, ageism etc.) and making lifestyle choices that reflect justice, this correlates strongly with their spiritual growth. Transformative Justice is part of living into God’s story and following Jesus.” (Ivy Beckwith and David Csinos, *Children’s Ministries in the way of Jesus*, 2013)

The research is very clear that service and faith development is most effective when families do it together rather than children doing it as part of some other group. Marcia Bunge says, “The family has the most potential of any institution for shaping the spiritual and moral lives of children. Best vehicles for transmitting faith: family rituals, family service projects and meaningful conversations with children in the home.” (Marcia Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought*, 2001)

Kara Powell and Chap Clark in their sticky faith research discovered that justice and service will create “sticky faith” when it hits kids close to home. “It needs to be in their home literally, as we as parents exemplify, encourage, and actually participate with our kids in righting the wrongs around them. It needs to hit close to home thematically, as we help our kids understand how particular injustices relate to their lives. It needs to hit home personally, as we expose our kids to actual people who have been oppressed, thereby giving injustice a face and a name. And justice ministry need to hit home relationally as we help our kids others in partnership with their family and friends.” (Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky faith*, 2011)

What can CHURCHES do?

Create opportunities for families to serve together.

1. ORGANISE A CHURCH SERVICE CLUB/INITIATIVE FOR FAMILIES TO BE INVOLVED IN. THIS MAKES IT EASIER FOR FAMILIES TO GET INVOLVED IN SERVICE AND ALSO MAKES SERVICE AND JUSTICE A REGULAR PART OF THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.
2. PROVIDE A LIST OF SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES TO SIGN UP FOR. MAKE IT AS EASY AS POSSIBLE FOR FAMILIES TO GET INVOLVED IN SERVICE BY SEEKING OUT AND SUPPORTING SAFE, APPROPRIATE PROJECTS THAT FAMILIES CAN DO TOGETHER.
3. ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO SERVE TOGETHER AS A WAY OF LIFE. SERVICE AND JUSTICE DOES NOT BECOME STICKY UNTIL IT IS A WAY OF LIFE FOR THE FAMILIES IN YOUR CHURCH.
4. CELEBRATE AND DEBRIEF SERVICE TRIPS AND EVENTS WITH THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF SERVICE WHERE SERVICE IS DEBRIEFED AND CELEBRATED AND THE IMPLICATIONS DRIVEN HOME INTO THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

What can FAMILIES do?

Serve together — service to others promotes a type of faith that sticks.

1. DEVELOP SOME FAMILY TRADITIONS AROUND SERVICE – MAKE IT A PART OF WHAT YOUR FAMILY IS. WHEN FAMILIES GET INVOLVED IN JUSTICE AND SERVICE TOGETHER AND IT IS A NATURAL PART OF WHAT THEY DO IT HAS A HUGE EFFECT ON FAMILY SPIRITUALITY AND CHILDREN'S FAITH DEVELOPMENT.
2. GO ON A FAMILY SERVICE TRIP. THIS COULD BE LOCAL, ACROSS THE COUNTRY OR ACROSS THE WORLD; THIS SORT OF TRIP CREATES A FAMILY MEMORY EVENT AND BECOMES PART OF THE FAMILY'S STORY. IT ALSO PROVIDES THE BONUS OF QUALITY FAMILY TIME TOGETHER AS WELL.
3. ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT CHILDREN TO SERVE OTHERS IN YOUR HOME, NEIGHBORHOOD, COMMUNITY AND CHURCH. SERVICE AND JUSTICE STARTS AT HOME IN THE MUNDANE RITUALS OF FAMILY LIFE. DOING THE DISHES, FEEDING THE ANIMALS AND PERFORMING OTHER FAMILY CHORES CAN THEN BRANCH OUT INTO THE WORLD BEYOND THE FAMILY HOME.
4. MAKE SURE THAT YOUR FAMILY SERVES TOGETHER RATHER THAN INDIVIDUALLY. THE KEY TO STICKY FAITH IS SERVING WITH YOUR FAMILY RATHER THAN INDIVIDUALLY. AS CHILDREN WATCH MUM AND DAD SERVING AND SERVE WITH THEM THE BENEFIT INCREASES FOR ALL CONCERNED.

5 Questions for Boards and Churches to Discuss/Brainstorm

1. HOW CAN WE HELP OUR FAMILIES TO MAKE JUSTICE AND SERVICE A PART OF THEIR REGULAR FAMILY LIFE?

2. HOW CAN WE MAKE SERVICE AND JUSTICE A REGULAR PART OF HOW WE DO CHURCH?

3. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN OUR REGULAR PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS SO THAT JUSTICE AND SERVICE HAS A HIGHER PRIORITY IN OUR CHURCHES AND FAMILIES?

4. WHAT SERVICE PROJECTS CAN WE PROMOTE TO THE FAMILIES IN OUR CHURCH?

5. HOW CAN WE MOST EFFECTIVELY CELEBRATE AND DEBRIEF FAMILY/CHURCH SERVICE PROJECTS?
