

Service: An Opportunity to Make a Difference

Michelle DeSilva, Teacher, College Park Elementary School, Oshawa, ON

In today's society, young people often feel a sense of self-entitlement and self-preoccupation. This generation has been nicknamed Generation Y. Some say they suffer from the "me" syndrome. "What's in it for me?" and "How does it benefit me?" are questions that often guide them. Most Gen Y'ers doubt the existence of God and if they demonstrate any interest in religion at all, they crave a practical, hands-on Christianity.

How fitting that Jesus encouraged this type of ministry in Matthew 25:34-36, 40: "...Come, you who are blessed of my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." *Jesus admonishes his followers to feed the hungry, be hospitable to strangers, clothe the needy, look after the sick, and care for those in prison.* Part of the mission of Adventist Education is to prepare young people for His service. The pen of inspiration reminds us that, "True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study... It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come." (*Education*, p. 13)

We often overlook the importance of fostering and providing meaningful service opportunities in our Adventist School settings. We must begin to purposefully and strategically plan opportunities for service. Haphazard approaches to service usually fail to meet their true potential. May I suggest that we take a moment to reflect again on Jesus' call to service in Matthew 25? Here are just a few class and school service ideas.

Feed the Hungry

- Organize a Thanksgiving Food Drive. Be sure to get a list of needed items and assign each class to bring a different item each week in October. This is an excellent way to complement and benefit your local church community service centre.
- Create uplifting holiday placemats for senior centers or Meals on Wheels recipients.
- Choose a gift from the ADRA Christmas Calendar and fundraise to donate a chicken, goat, or something else to a family in need.

Hospitality & Caring for Others

- Train students to be Guest Teacher Hosts/Helpers.
- Train students to be school hosts/greeters on School Visitation Day or the First Day of School.
- Assign students to be Recess Time Hosts/Playmates to help familiarize new students with playground equipment and rules.
- Have students fill an Operation Christmas Child Shoebox. Be sure to show free promotional video. Encourage students to include a picture and a note.
- Assemble Friendship Shoeboxes with handwritten notes, inexpensive stickers, play dough, small books, puzzles, etc. Take the boxes to a homeless shelter or under-served children's centre.
- Sponsor an SDA school in an underprivileged country.

- Adopt a street or neighbourhood for Earth Day.

Clothe the Needy

- Make or donate fleece blankets to present to a domestic-abuse shelter, crisis centre or children's hospital.
- Donate mittens, scarves, and clothing during a winter clothing drive.
- Donate new or slightly used crocs to Crocs for Tots. These are then donated to children in Africa.

Take care of the Sick

- Make cards for children in hospitals, individuals on church prayer lists, or shut-in lists.
- Go on a field trip to a nursing home or hospital. Put on an uplifting programme.

Take care of Prisoners:

- Prison Fellowship & Angel Tree Ministry at Christmas: Encourage students to buy a Christmas gift for the child of an inmate in lieu of exchanging class gifts or buying the teacher a gift.

It's never too early to start planning. An excellent online resource for children's service ideas is www.kidscare.org. This website provides individuals with monthly service ideas. I challenge each teacher and school to prayerfully consider the theme of service for the 2011-2012 school year. Come together as staff and brainstorm ideas for how your classrooms and schools can serve your communities and those abroad. There are countless opportunities to be the hands of Jesus and make a difference in the lives of those around us.