



## **Study Guide 6: STORY OF SERVICE**

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What stories get told through service experiences? When service and mission experiences are thought of as more than projects and trips, service can become a lifelong spiritual practice and way of life.

### **Introduction**

Service projects and missions trips are increasingly common practices among church groups. Many focus on local projects, where groups gather for a couple of hours to complete a specific project, such as collecting items for a food bank, visiting elderly church members, or cleaning up a neighborhood park. Other groups embark on short-term mission trips across the country or overseas to build houses, serve the homeless in another community, install fresh-water wells, or to learn about another culture or context different from their own. Some congregations do both.

Invite conversation on the following questions:

- Why do you think service projects and mission trips are increasingly common?
- What are the positive aspects of this trend?
- What are the potential downsides and challenges of this practice?

Service experiences can be designed to more deeply capture and embrace the diversity of stories you encounter in the community you service and within your group.

### **Know the Story**

Read John 13:3-9, 12-16

(Other stories you might use with the questions below: Luke 24:13-15; John 4:5-30; Matthew 25:31-46)

- What story (or stories) do you see present in this passage? Who's telling the story? Who's listening? What message is being conveyed?
- In what ways might this passage deepen your understanding of service and mission?
- In light of this passage, how might service experiences be better designed to provide intentional opportunities to listen to, embrace, and celebrate the stories of others?

### **Be the Story**

"Service learning" is an intentional four-step process that can add deeper meaning and value to service and mission experiences. By contrast, "volunteering" and "community service" are often seen as one-time events, with little preparation on the part of participants and little (if any) debriefing and follow up. Through the process of Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Celebration, service learning emphasizes service as more than projects and trips, but an on-going process of service and learning, if not a spiritual practice and way of life.

If possible, view the Video Supplement for "Story and Service" found at [www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015](http://www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015). A brief summary of the Service Learning Process includes:

**Step 1: Preparation**

Preparation is often focused on logistics. But it's also important to listen and learn from stories in our community or the context in which you serve. Explore the identified needs, concerns and opportunities and then select a service experience that allows your group to address what you've heard. Building community within your group is also essential.

**Step 2: Action**

Engage in the service experience, find ways for everyone to contribute in a meaningful way, and consider how your group can best recognize, honor and embrace the stories of those you serve.

**Step 3: Reflection**

Taking time to debrief and reflect on the experience, moves service projects from short term "mountain top" experiences into experiences with deeper, richer and lasting meaning that shape future attitudes and behaviors.

**Step 4: Celebration**

Honor and celebrate the groups common experience, stories heard and exchanged, and lives forever changed through scripture, prayer, spiritual practices.

- How can the service learning process be used to enhance a service experience?
- What is the potential for connecting to stories of others or the community through service?
- Which practices might our group question or reconsider in order to be more fully present as servants and partners?

**Tell the Story**

Think of a service project or mission trip you are planning in the near future – or one you have recently done. Consider the questions from the "Service Learning Planning Guide" handout for how you might (or could have on a previous event) make the experience a richer and deeper experience.

**Closing Prayer**

Holy God, inspire us to be your servants in your world and among your people. Give us strength and courage to listen deeply for the joys, concerns, opportunities, and challenges of others and of our community. Open our ears and hearts to the incredible opportunity to embrace, honor, and celebrate the stories we encounter. Bind those stories to our own, and ultimately gather them into yours. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*(Adapted from the PD2015 Session, "Story of Service" by Mark Jackson, Trinity Lutheran College. For complete curriculum visit [www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015](http://www.elcaymnet.org/PD2015).)*

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