



Topics: Serving the Community

What if a topic on "People who help us" became "Serving the community"?

Denise taught a lesson on people who help us to her elementary class. She wanted to change the title to "Serving our community" so that the focus was not primarily on "us."

"We looked at the work of the police and fire departments, and then a parent who was a nurse came in to talk. However, I felt this was not enough, as there are many people who give to the community in an informal way and without pay. I organized visits from local volunteer groups and one of our sponsoring churches. The children knew little about what the church did in the community beyond the after-school club that it ran. I organized a visit from various people from the church who spoke about what it did in the community, including their own work with various age groups and special interest groups such as the art group and book club. I reviewed the resources I used to make sure they had a community emphasis and checked that the display was in line with the new focus."

"An artist from the church ran an art club for school for the duration of the topic where students created something for others. A school book club was started as part of the after-school club. The students were given the opportunity to do something for the community as a result of the topic. They were invited to help with the church community day, posters, and invitations."

What's going on here?

Denise saw her topic as a place to highlight serving and to take the focus from self to others and the wider community. She also affirmed the role of faith.

She engaged students in shifting their focus from the group to the community, having them interact with visitors from outside the class, and to act upon an outward-looking emphasis by creating something for others (change of title, visitors, chance to help the community).

She reshaped her practice by checking her resources and the display, using key words and questions to focus the lesson, inviting others into class, and creating a service opportunity.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Denise wanted her students to see Christian faith in action in the community. Such community action is a practical outworking of love. Across the country there are faith-based projects — big and small — that bring hope to communities. Some initiatives are Christian in origin and composition; at other times, Christians work alongside people of other faiths and none, affirming the belief that God is at work in the world outside the walls of our churches. Sometimes it is a case of finding where God is working and joining in.

What difference does it make?

Denise made a difference just by changing the title. “People who help us” puts the focus on us as the recipients, whereas Denise’s changes moved the focus to serving the community.

Where could we go from here?

Denise could check the titles of other topics and think about what message they send and whether it really is the message she wants. Other areas of study can be given a community emphasis and connected with what people are doing in the local community.

Digging deeper

Christian community is based on all being one in Christ and expressing that oneness in a compassionate lifestyle (Romans 12:9-10). It is lived in supporting each other, sharing in working together for others, and giving of time, wealth, and self.

Not only are Christians called to be in community, they are called to serve as a community. Service should distinguish the Christian way of life at work, in the home, and in relationships. The Bible calls people to serve their wider communities and to work for their well-being (Jeremiah 29:7), fostering love and justice. The Bible calls on Christians to be good citizens, always ready to do good and living at peace with their neighbors. Jesus made it clear that those who are greatest in the kingdom of God are those who serve God and others (Matthew 20:26).

One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbor; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us. John Wesley

The duty is now emphasized of serving God in the world, in every position in life. Abraham Kuyper

Our society looks for freedom and happiness in wealth, fame, and power. The Bible sees it in giving and serving others. One Anglican prayer describes the service of God as “perfect freedom.” Those words translate *cui servire, regnare est*, “to serve is to reign.” To serve God and others is the highest honor; it is what we were created for.

One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve. Albert Schweitzer



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