

The Just People guide to a successful day of action

Why is the day of action important? Churches that have run the course have consistently told us that the day of action was the most memorable and important aspect of the course. It is tempting to skip this since it is harder to organise than the sessions but it will likely be the best part of your course.

Isn't a day of action just tokenism? Clearly one day of action is unlikely to change the world – primarily it is a learning exercise that allows the group to reflect together and bring the themes of the course alive. Your day of action will be more effective if you connect it to an area of work that you are already linked with. Use it as an opportunity to build and deepen relationships with your local community. Also, it is important to remember how much 15-20 enthusiastic people can do in one day.

Do we need to spend a whole day doing something? The amount of time you spend is less important than what you do. Some groups have found an afternoon or evening of action to be easier for people to commit to.

Key tips:

- 1) **Start discussing ideas and planning what you could do as early as possible.** We would strongly recommend course leaders set the date before beginning the course.
- 2) **Think about the work your church is already involved in and what community connections you already have.**
 - Do you have existing relationship with a local school, care home, community centre or other social project?
 - If not, what social projects exist in your area?
 - Do you have a relationship with a local charity or justice group?
 - When you read the local newspaper, what are the issues that are highlighted?

Key questions:

- Is there an obvious need in the community that could be helped by a day of action?

Go and talk to those involved in local residents or tenants associations or a teacher or community worker. Be open about the fact that the church is doing a course on the ways that churches can serve their communities and

that this involves a practical day of action. You may well be surprised at the ideas that this gives you.

- 3) **Don't be put off if people on the course are negative about the day of action** – You may find that discussing the day of action will bring out all sorts of excuses and criticisms, especially if what you have decided to do is challenging. Try and inject as much enthusiasm as possible as this will make a huge difference to people getting out there.
- 4) **Try to minimise the tokenism of the day** by ensuring the project is as helpful as possible, but remind the group that the main point is to get people on their feet doing something together – it's been our experience that nothing will help the group's collective learning and reflection more than simply getting on with something for a day.

Examples of large scale days of action:

- **Christ Church, New Malden, Surrey:** ran an open coffee morning on their High Street one Saturday along with a 'Stop the Traffik' event. They put 'for sale' signs on the children on church members to highlight the trafficking of children that goes on and asked people to sign up for the campaign. Through the coffee morning they spoke with many local people and did questionnaires on how to build community in the local area.
- **The churches of West Streatham:** three churches combined to run the course over lent and held their day of action on a Sunday morning as a joint service. They got permission to close the road between the churches and after a brief outdoor commissioning service five different teams went out to local schools and care homes to do practical jobs such as gardening and painting. They returned to have a fair-trade lunch called 'food for thought' to which local people were invited and local and national charities had stalls to promote their work for compassion and justice.
- **Bloomsbury Baptist Church in central London:** decided to do a night of action and sleep rough for one night in central London along with a homeless person who regularly attends their church. This involved six members of the small group who were doing the course, plus the minister, bedding down for the night and then reflecting on their experiences. They described this as an act of 'radical listening' in order to understand better the situation faced by the homeless. This action led to a series of events which resulted in the church meeting the local council and a change in their policy towards homeless people.

Ideas of other days of action:

- Painting and decorating job at an inner city community centre, giving the entrance and toilets a much needed re-paint. This encouraged the church and further built relationships.
- Offering time as a group to the Besom, a charity which distributes clothes and practical help to people affected by poverty. See www.besom.org.uk to see if there is one local to you.
- A family fun-day / community barbeque – team up with a local community group to put on an event for local families.
- If litter and rubbish dumping is an issue in your area, liaise with the local council about doing a proper litter pick. A church in South London did this in a coordinated partnership with the council so staff and volunteers worked alongside each other.
- Providing entertainment and practical help at a local care home – as one group was singing well known songs to the older residents, other people did gardening and clearing for the home.
- If you live in an ethnically diverse area, organise an international food event where everyone brings food from their home country. This can be a brilliant event to bring people together – why not organise it in conjunction with a local asylum seeker group or with a local mosque or Gurdwara?
- If you have an older group you can organise a letter writing morning. Ask a few people to prepare brief presentations on world issues they are concerned about and gather together to hear about them – whether this be trade justice, people wrongly imprisoned or something more local. Ask them to bring with them the details of who can be written to – whether this is a local MP or directly to the perpetrators. Provide paper and pens and envelopes and encourage everyone to write. Once the letters are written, pray over the issues and your letters and then post them. If you have the internet then others could work online.
- Organise a ‘football in the community’ event – this could range from organising a kick around for local kids known to the church to putting on a mini tournament for lots of teams.
- Odd-jobs at a local school – one church did a range of jobs at a primary school including painting railings and designing a mural on a wall.
- A one-off job for someone in need. Undertaking the decorating of a room or the clearing of a garden for someone known to the church. One church organised a house clearance for a young woman in the church who had moved into a drug rehab centre. If you do not know of anyone in need, you could always ask a local volunteer bureau or the leader of another church.

Want to know more? Read about the impact of the day of action on other churches on the Just People pages of the Community Mission website at www.communitymission.org.uk

For further help and advice, please call Livability Community Mission on 020 7452 2018.

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