

Why do a Mission Week in your home town rather than go on a mission trip?

1) Cost

Let's face it, mission trips are expensive. Most churches don't have the funds that they used to have when it comes to funding such trips. And spending all of your youth group time on fundraising, may not be the best thing for the long-term interests of a church that seeks to grow disciples.

In this world of limited resources, cost-benefit does matter. Even if I have the \$10,000 I need to fund my youth group's trip to Mississippi, is that still the best way to spend those resources? Will we accomplish \$10,000 worth of good? Or is it better to spend \$2,000 for our stay-at-home mission week and donate the other \$8,000 to Back Bay Mission and allow them to hire a local person who desperately needs the job to do the repairs?

2) Community Connections

Our local YMCA provides showers for the mission week. The local food pantry is one of our work sites. Homeowners whose homes we have cleaned up have told their neighbors and friends about us. The local newspaper did a feature article on us. Kids driving with parents on the way to practice point and say "down there is the house we worked on last summer."

3) Youth Participation

Whenever there is a mission trip, there are some youth who don't participate. For some it may be a money issue (and even if you offer "scholarships," some don't participate because they don't want to ask for a scholarship), but sometimes it is simply that another important event is happening during the time frame.

Because we stay in town, parents can pick up their child for a doctor's appointment, football practice, their summer job, or Grandpa's retirement party. (Parents then return them to church, worksite or activity). We put some limits as to how often and how many hours they can be away.

4) Adult Volunteers

A lot of adults have jobs. They have employers who expect them to either show up for work, or take a week of vacation. Some people in our churches are glad to take a week of vacation to take the youth group on the mission trip. But not everyone can, or wants to.

Because we don't leave town, it is possible for adults to actively volunteer with the program without being gone from work for an entire week. We have an early morning crew that makes breakfast and packs up lunches and the goes on to work a normal work day. We have day workers who can't give a whole week, but who will gladly take off a day of work and spend it on site with the youth. We have a couple of seniors who help shuttle kids to showers and dinner. We have adults who host a team of kids in their home for an evening meal. The whole church is actively involved in a variety of ways, and as such takes ownership in the event. We still have a few key people who spend the entire week with the group. But it is not just a few people who are involved.

I think this is good for a number of reasons. Every act of reaching out to help puts our welcome mat out a little farther. It makes it a little easier to reach out again, and reach out further. Having a whole congregation that is learning how to reach out to the community in new ways is good for the long-term health of the church. When people "buy into" programs with their time and talents, they are more likely to work to see that those programs continue. Finally, it means more adults know more youth in our congregation. Which is important because...

5) Builds inter-generational relations

The longer I'm in ministry, the more I realize that inter-generational relationships for youth are key to those youth remaining active in the church as adults. Building relationships between youth is good. But when that young adult returns for a visit after college, are any of his/her peers going to greet him/her on any given Sunday? Chances are, the people that s/he's going to see are adults. The pastor who shepherded him/her through confirmation or the youth director who first got him/her excited about Christ, may have moved on. Paid staff tend to do that. Laypersons are more likely to be present when that youth enters this next phase of life. The more adults who s/he has had meaningful relationships with, the more at home s/he's going to feel when s/he returns to worship.

6) Evangelism

I don't know about anyone else, but if I'm taking a group of kids from Pennsylvania to Denver, and I get a call from a parent who is calling around to different churches because their child needs court-mandated community service, I'm not thinking "oh, let's take her on the mission trip with us." For one thing, it's expensive. But the bigger thing is I don't want to take a kid I don't know on an out of state trip. If something goes wrong, and I need to send her home, it's a hassle. Plus it's been my experience that I get these "my child needs community service" phone calls at the last minute – long after the plans for the big trip have been made.

Since we operate in our own neighborhood, I can accept these kids. If something goes wrong (it never has, by the way – although we have had a child get sick and need to go home) I can drive them home and be back in 15 minutes. It's allowed us to open our doors to some unchurched kids. Some of these kids have some pretty messed up family situations, and it's given us the opportunity to be a positive force in these kid's lives. Most of the unchurched kids who have gotten involved in Mission Week have stayed involved in our weekly youth program. And some of them have matured into quite different people since entering the program. Isn't this what we all want to be doing, changing lives?

And this goes both ways. My kids are inviting some friends to mission week this year and their parents are willing to entrust their kids for something that is happening locally, but who might not be as comfortable sending their kids out of town with our church.

7) Next Step Mission

Getting involved in any mission project – be it one in your neighborhood or one hundreds of miles away – is going to make you aware that what you are doing is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to problems of poverty. If the problems you become aware of are in your own backyard, it impels you forward into deeper levels of caring.