

REFLECTION ACTIVITIES

For One-Time Service Events

What is Reflection?

Reflection is pausing to review, ponder, contemplate, analyze, or evaluate your service experience in order to gain deeper understanding. It serves as a bridge between experiences and learning. Rather than limiting the focus to the affective issue of “How did you feel about the project?” it expands the focus to, “What does this say about myself, about our world, and about my role in the world?” Reflection is crucial to the process of integrating the service experience into consciousness and to providing a potentially transformative experience to volunteers. Reflection is also an avenue to explore service/faith connections.

Top Reasons to Reflect

1. It is a reality check that guards against reinforcing inaccurate perceptions and biases.
2. It helps with problem solving in specific situations, issues, etc.
3. It supplies on-going education on general issues related to service (i.e. the family socioeconomic, cross-culture, and the developmental issues in cross-age mentoring programs).
4. It clarifies values as students confront new issues.
5. It integrates service and relates learning to the rest of one's life.
6. It answers the questions “What difference does my service make to the community?” and “Why perform service?”
7. It builds community among participants.
8. It helps students address the issue of confidentiality.

Planning Reflection

In order to be most effective, facilitators should be purposeful in planning the reflection component of the service experience. The following factors should be considered:

- 1. Setting Goals:** Reflection has many possible outcomes, including increased awareness of social issues, values clarification, and even program evaluation. Before initiating reflection the facilitator must consider which outcomes are possible and desirable. Reflection goals will be related to the group's goals, and possibly to the type of service in which students are participating. In addition, goals should be considered for participants as well as for the group as a whole. The goals can be broad, rather than specific, allowing for their further development throughout reflection. The facilitator should be flexible, recognizing that reflection evolves and goals may change.
- 2. Knowing Your Audience:** Consider who will be participating in the reflection. Are they new to service? If not, what is the extent of their previous experience? How long have they been at college? What academic subjects are they most interested in? What strengths do they

bring to the reflection sessions? What might be potential tension points? Be prepared to encourage each individual's participation and to recognize their contributions. Choose activities and approaches that foster this.

3. **Making Time:** The reflection component should be built into the service experience, rather than being an "extra" or "add-on" activity. The amount of time allotted for reflection will depend, in part, on the issues that are being addressed (for example, racism) and the intensity of the service experience (for example, alternative spring break programs should schedule daily reflection sessions). Make certain that participants are aware of the time responsibilities for reflection and that the sessions are scheduled at convenient times for participants.
4. **Choosing a Method:** When choosing methods for reflection be certain to keep the following points in mind:
 - Choose activities in which participants will be comfortable expressing themselves and will feel safe doing so. Group activities should also promote cohesion while allowing for diverse opinions. This is accomplished not only by the activity that is chosen, but by the way in which that activity is facilitated.
 - Be creative and include a variety of activities. Reflection should be appropriate for different learning styles, and should be enjoyable for the participants.
5. **Resources:** Facilitators should identify other resources pertaining to service and reflection that can provide information and support. This may include people on campus, in the community and in national service organizations, as well as relevant materials such as literature, research, and activity guides. (See social justice resources on pgs. 7-9 of this packet. Also, the CCSJ library has a variety of books and videos, and is located in Cohn Hall. Or, feel free to talk with CCSJ full-time staff for ideas and assistance).

Reflection Techniques: There are many different ways to structure a reflection. Two methods are outlined below. If you are interested in other possibilities, the full-time staff in the Center for Community Service and Justice would be happy to review alternative reflection techniques.

1. The Reflection Circle

The most basic form this reflection takes is the reflection circle. In this forum the tools of good facilitation are used and questions are raised that start participants thinking about their experiences and their learning. The strengths of the reflection circle mirror those of good facilitation, and include providing space in which

- each participant has a right and an opportunity to speak
- every idea has value and can contribute to learning
- individual contributions are recognized
- participants are responsible for their own learning

Reflection participants should be seated in a circle, with the facilitator(s) seated

along with them. Facilitators should not be separated out by standing up or speaking at a podium. A reflection question is posed by the facilitator and participants are encouraged to respond. Good facilitation is crucial to effective full group participation. Questions can be flexible and flow from the developing discussion, or can incorporate slightly more structure following a particular theme identified for the reflection session. Similarly, questions can be as broad as "What prompted you to sign up for this service experience?" or more specific like: "Based on your work in an AIDS hospice, what are your thoughts on health care reform?" Following is a list of sample questions for a reflection circle.

Possible Reflection Questions

Descriptive:

Describe the people you met at the service site.

Name three things that stuck in your mind about the service experience.

Describe the atmosphere of the service site.

Describe some of your interactions.

What do you think (activity described in previous questions) happened?

What brings people to the service site (both people seeking service and the volunteers)?

Emotive:

How did you feel about people's responses?

How did you feel about the service site (compared to other identifiable places)?

OR What feelings came up for you while you were at the service site?

What did the "body language" of the people tell you?

What was the best/worst/most challenging thing that happened?

Did you feel like a part of the community you were working in?

Interpretive:

How are you similar/different to the others (others in your service group? others seeking services? etc.)?

In what ways did being different help/hinder the group?

How does this experience compare to others you've had?

What connections do you see between this experience and what you've learned in your college courses?

How do you define community?

Self-Reflective:

Why do you do service? For self-interest or altruism?

What have you learned about yourself?

How were you different when you left the service location compared to when you entered?

If you were one of the people receiving services, what would you think of yourself?

How has your service contributed to your growth in any of these areas: civic responsibility, political consciousness, professional development, spiritual fulfillment, social understanding, intellectual pursuit?

Considering Broader Societal Issues:

What have you learned about a particular community or societal issue?

How did this experience challenge your assumptions and stereotypes?

Do you think these people (or situations) are unique? Why or why not?

What public policies are involved and what are their implications? How can they be improved?

Who determines what's best for the community?

Describe what a typical day might be like for someone who uses the services of the organization you worked with.

How would you do this differently if you were in charge?

Discuss a social problem that you have come in contact with during your service work.

What do you think are the root causes of this problem? Explain how your service may or may not contribute to its alleviation.

What could this group do to address the problems we saw at the service site?

What could each participant do on his/her own?

How can society better deal with the problem?

What Can You Take Away?:

Describe an internal or external conflict that has surfaced for you during your service work. Explain the factors that contribute to it and how you might resolve or cope with the conflict.

How can this experience apply to other situations in your life?

How can your solutions apply to other situations in your life?

How can your solutions apply to other problem(s) of other groups?

How can society be more compassionate/informed/involved regarding this community?

What is the difference between generosity, charity, justice, and social change?

Where do we go from here? What's the next step?

A single question is often the simplest way to start a group talking. The questions listed in the previous "Reflection Circle" section are basic to reflection and address a range of aspects of the service experience. Facilitators should review that list and consider incorporating some of these or similar questions into the group's reflection sessions. When choosing questions, consider the group or individuals' experience with service or the community. We would discourage first-time volunteers from making broad, and possibly inaccurate, generalizations based on a one-time experience. Consider starting with questions in the first categories and moving into the last categories only if participants have had more experience with service.

2. What? /So What? /Now What?

This structure for reflection questions is perhaps the most widely known and used. It is a basic way to promote discussion that begins with reviewing the details of the experience and moves toward critical thinking, problem solving, and creating an action plan.

What?

- Facts, what happened, with whom
- Substance of group interaction

So what?

- Shift from descriptive to interpretive
- Meaning of experience for each participant
- Feelings involved, lessons learned
- Why?

Now what?

- Contextual-- seeing this situation's place in the big picture
- How can we apply lessons learned /insights gained to new situations
- Setting future goals, creating an action plan

3. The Examen

Adapted from Intersection's Document, Boston College.

(This can be used for groups that are interested in exploring spiritual connections with service. In addition, it can be adapted using more general language).

This is a daily practice Jesuits use to help them realize the movements of God in their daily lives. You can use it to help notice God's presence and companionship in your life or simply as a reflective tool. The Examen can be used to reflect on any specific timeframe.

The practice:

1. Take a few deep breaths and center yourself.
2. Take two minutes of silence to consider the following questions:
 - For what are you most grateful?
 - For what are you least grateful?
3. Return gently back to your day.
4. Ask God for the graces you need to improve upon and thank God for the graces you have received.

You might consider using one of the following dyads:

- When did I give and receive the most love? Least love?
- When did I feel most alive? Most drained of life?
- When did I have the greatest sense of belonging? Least sense of belonging?
- When was I most free? Least free?
- When was I most creative? Least creative?
- When did I feel most connected? Least connected?
- When did I feel fully myself? Least fully myself?
- When did I feel most whole? Most fragmented?
- When did I succeed? Fail?
- When did I have a special encounter with a family member? Friend? Co-worker? Other?
- When did I experience forgiveness, compassion, justice, courage, joy, gratitude?
- How have I felt God present for me? Felt God Absent?

Social Justice References and Materials

Helpful Websites about Baltimore...

Maryland Poverty Statistics:

<http://www.marylandpolicy.org/html/research/POVERTYfaq2002.asp> : Explanation of what the poverty level is, how it's calculated, and how many Marylanders are considered materially poor.

Baltimore City 2007 Census: The Picture of Homelessness

http://www.baltimorehealth.org/info/2007%20BaltimoreCityHomelessCensus_9_14_07.pdf: An up-to-date resource that covers gender, race, level of education and causes for individuals experiencing homelessness in Baltimore City.

Baltimore Safety Net Access-to-Care Survey 2006

http://www.fusiongroup.org/BREACH1.2006Survey.Report.swf?POPUP_ENABLED=true :

Data from a survey done by REACH, an organization representing community-based safety net organizations that provide medical and social service assistance to low income Baltimore residents.

Baltimore City Public School Statistics

http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/md/district_profile/3 : lists of the schools that are "in need of improvement" and "available for transfer" according to the standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Kids Count

<http://www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/aecensus.cgi?action=profileresults&area=2404000P&areaparent=24S>: statistics on reading levels, absences, and violence in schools, etc. for Maryland schools.

Hispanic Issues

www.pewhispanic.org : recent stats and updates facts sheets on Hispanic issues and concerns.

Maryland Latino Coalition for Justice

www.latinosinmaryland.org a statewide advocacy organization that promotes human rights, civic participation, and the well being of the Latino community in the state of Maryland.

Migration Information

www.migrationinformation.org : fast facts on migration as well as full length stories.

Justice for Immigrants

www.justiceforimmigrants.org: provides tools and information for diocesan and community-based organizing, education, and advocacy efforts.

Helpful Websites about the Country...

Hungerinamerica.org: Data and reports from Hunger Study 2006 by America's Second Harvest

Alternet.org: alternative political/human interest articles

Servenet.org: site on service and volunteering

Energizeinc.com: for leaders of volunteers

Wiretapmag.org: socially conscious information geared toward college students

Coc.org: Center of Concern

Networklobby.org: National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Maryknoll.org: Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns

Bread.org: Bread for the World

Universallivingwage.org: Universal Living Wage

Fns.usda.gov: US Department of Agriculture. Food, nutrition and consumer services information

Colseup.org: Current issues information and civic education

Nationalpriorities.org (/database): National Priorities Project. Database for how federal

spending policies affect yours state

Fao.org: Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN

Forumfoodsovereignty.org: Forum for Food Sovereignty

Nationalhomeless.org: National Coalition for the Homeless

Nlihc.org: National Low Income Housing Coalition

Poverty 2004 Highlights from US Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty04/pov04hi.html>

- ✓ The official poverty rate in 2004 was 12.7 %, up from 12.5 % in 2003.
- ✓ In 2004, 37.0 million people were in poverty, up 1.1 million from 2003.
- ✓ Poverty rates remained unchanged for Blacks (24.7 %) and Hispanics (21.9 %), rose for non-Hispanic Whites (8.6 % in 2004, up from 8.2 % in 2003) and decreased for Asians (9.8 % in 2004, down from 11.8 % in 2003).
- ✓ The poverty rate in 2004 (12.7 %) was 9.7 percentage points lower than in 1959, the first year for which poverty estimates are available (Figure 3). From the most recent trough in 2000 both the number and rate have risen for four consecutive years, from 31.6 million and 11.3 % in 2000, to 37.0 million and 12.7 % in 2004 respectively.
- ✓ For children under 18 years old, both the 2004 poverty rate (17.8 %) and the number in poverty (13.0 million) remained unchanged from 2003. The poverty rate for children under 18 remained higher than that of 18-to-64-year olds (11.3 %) and that of people aged 65 and over (9.8 %).
- ✓ Both the poverty rate and number in poverty increased for people 18 to 64 years old (11.3 % and 20.5 million in 2004, up from 10.8 % and 19.4 million in 2003).
- ✓ The poverty rate decreased for seniors aged 65 and over was 9.8 % in 2004, down from 10.2 % in 2003, while the number in poverty in 2004 (3.5 million) was unchanged.

Recommended Books:

The CCSJ Resource Library is located in front of the Office Manager's office in Cohn Hall. These books, videos and other resources are available to everyone on campus. There is a sign-out card system and books/resource materials should be returned in two weeks. Some suggested books are:

Faith Beyond Resentment by James Alison

Binding the Strong Man by Ched Myers

Spiritual Journeys. Edited by Stanislaus Kennedy

Sweet Charity by Janet Poppendick

Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform by Sharon Hays

Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting By in America by Barbara Ehrenreich

Without a Net: Middle Class and Homeless (With Kids) in America by Michelle Kennedy

The Working Poor: Invisible in America by David Shipler

How Can I Help? by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman

Surviving in a Material World by Ronald Paul Hill

The Long Haul by Horton-Kohl-Kohl

Urban Injustice: How Ghettos Happen by David Hilfiker