

SYNERGY newsletter



Ideas To Ignite Your Church's Global Impact

In This Edition

MAY 2007: COOPERATING WITH OTHER CHURCHES TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

- **FEATURE:** Churches of many denominations are making an impact in Southern California as they unite to serve their communities.
- **TOOL PACKAGE:** Use the Internet to see video clips a church produced to get their congregation "out of their chairs", to find opportunities for service in your zip code, and to read what other churches have done to serve their neighborhoods.
- **GREAT IDEAS:** A church shares ten principles they have learned in serving the city of Long Beach, California. Discover specific ways and places to serve in your community.



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SERVE DAY

She walked the beach, grieving alone. Her marriage--and her world--had fallen apart. Time passed unnoticed. Returning to her car, she knew she had long overstayed the parking meter. To her surprise, a total stranger had fed her meter, and instead of a ticket, on the windshield she found a card, "You've been served!" The message indicated that someone from **ROCKHARBOR** (a church!) had done her the favor and unknowingly showed love at a time when her heart was breaking. She sought out that church and attended on Sunday, hungry to know the kind of people and the motivation that caused complete strangers to minister to her in her pain.

It is one of many stories coming out of Serve Day, multiplied countless times, as dozens of churches participate annually to change their communities through unselfish service. When scores of unrelated churches unite to serve their neighborhoods together, expecting nothing in return, it can have a powerful impact in their community!

How it Happened

ROCKHARBOR is a proactive, burgeoning congregation occupying a warehouse in an industrial area of Costa Mesa, California. They see themselves as a congregation of believers who "get out of their chairs" to make a difference in their world. And their contagious giving has spread to many other congregations in several surrounding counties of Southern California!

ROCKHARBOR started out as a small congregation renting
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a local senior center for their weekly services. One day each year the facility was unavailable to them. As they discussed what to do without a meeting place that day, someone suggested that perhaps they could use the opportunity instead to go out and serve their community. Responding with enthusiasm, the members joyfully went out into their neighborhoods to plant and paint, cook and clean, mentor and mow, tutor and tailor--all for others. That evening they came back together to share their stories and reports. With great excitement they reviewed the events of the day, and they knew this would become an annual event--a tradition! So was birthed Serve Day.

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The first Serve Day was organized by **ROCKHARBOR** in 2000. The following year University Praise, a congregation in nearby Fullerton, California, started a similar program. Several churches began working together, and last year they combined various separate programs into a unified one including the Inland Empire as well as Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego Counties--a large portion of Southern California! This year they expect sixty churches to participate. Mike Kenyon, Reach Pastor of **ROCKHARBOR** (see picture below) says, "For that day, sixty churches become one church."

How it Works

The program administration is web based. Churches use paper brochures for advertising, but they are encouraged to use the web to sign up, estimate volunteer numbers and choose projects. Pastor Mike says, "Your church is responsible for the bandwidth of what you can do."

Churches pay \$4.00 per team member, and the money is used to cover all the costs of promotion and administration for the event. Serve Day T-shirts are \$5.00 each.

Each county has one anchor church, which acts as a hub. One or two volunteers are assigned as leaders for each project. Leaders are responsible to call, follow up and give directions to all team members, making sure everyone understands--and will actually show up on the big day!

Many participants travel long distances each Sunday to attend services in their own churches. However, since the program covers a wide area and includes many churches, individuals can be involved in projects near their homes

individuals can be involved in projects near their homes, not necessarily near their church locations, and volunteers from several churches might work together on an assignment in their own locale.



Serve Day usually takes place the last Saturday of July. Prior to that date, senior pastors of participating churches meet together for a brunch and time of networking. Training takes place for two hours on the first Saturday of April and includes the "why's" behind Serve Day, vision casting, the value of being the church, instruction on how to use the website, the organizational chart, plans and logistical arrangements. Training is mandatory for participating churches. The night before Serve Day, a combined prayer vigil is held in each county, preparing the way for effective ministry.

The Participants

Serve Day is for everyone! Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and Friends churches participate along with many other denominational and non-denominational groups. Caucasian, African-American, Latino and Asian congregations unite to serve together. Churches of all sizes and people of all ages participate. Many of the projects are family friendly. Even two- and three-year-olds can help with simple tasks or with a project such as gleaning in the strawberry fields. Young children, visiting along with their parents, can bring great joy to the hearts of elderly people in nursing homes!

Why They Serve

The website explains the motivation behind Serve Day: "We want to mobilize local churches into local missions for the day to give churches an opportunity to spread the gospel to our community through our actions. We believe by serving our community's needs we are meeting our biblical command to care for the poor and needy, widows and orphans. It is a way for us on a large scale to show Christ's love to others in practical ways."

Volunteers Share Their Experiences

Last year a large team of over 100 volunteers from churches all over Orange County joined together to clean up the beach. The leader says:

"It was exciting to see people serve alongside one another putting aside any differences

one another, putting aside any differences their churches might have, and simply being the hands and feet of Christ. It is also great to see families serving together, from babies in strollers on up to grandmas and grandpas. Serve Day is really a day of uniting the body of Christ."

Another team last year set up an "art in the park" event for girls from a group home. Two of them shared their experiences.

"There was a group of girls who didn't really want to be there, and they were sitting by themselves kind of being too cool. They had mentioned that they wanted to play soccer. One of the volunteers went looking for a soccer ball. When she couldn't find one she said that she was going to the store to buy one so they could play. One of the girls was really shocked that she would go through the trouble just for them and was just like 'Wow! That is really nice.'"

"My experience of working with the kids was awesome. God allowed me to use my artistic abilities to reach the kids and that was a great feeling. I got the opportunity to have several one-on-one conversations with different kids that might not have approached me otherwise, while they sat and allowed me to paint tattoos on their bodies. The time I was able to spend with the individual kids was a valuable time. I will probably pursue other opportunities to work with group home kids in the future."

In 2005 a dozen volunteers spent the day cleaning at Orange County's Ronald McDonald House. They were all so moved by the experience that they decided to visit every month! One of the volunteers explains...

"We loved showing the families God's love in action. From our cleaning experience, we decided to make it a monthly serve activity and have been going there ever since. We generally bake or do art/craft activities with the families who are staying there who have sick children at CHOC (Children's Hospital of Orange County). It has been such an awesome experience to minister to the siblings and parents of the sick children by giving them a 'break from reality' while they participate in something fun and enjoyable. They are so burdened by their current circumstance and having people come in and 'play' with them and pray with them is 'life-saving', even for just a couple of hours. Many families have been gratefully accepting of our prayers and play time with them!"

As Pastor Mike says, "Missions naturally come out of Serve Day." The important thing is not the event itself but what comes after Serve Day. Missions pastors from several churches are committed to follow up, working on

