



Issue #53: Fall 2023



Editors' Note:

Several months ago when Allie and I were brainstorming a topic for this issue, we had both recently returned from, or were planning youth mission trips and were feeling inspired to bring those experiences to the Quarterly. While certainly not every DCE will lead a youth mission trip during their ministry, it seems the vast majority do. We've found that some DCEs love every aspect of youth mission trips - the planning, organizing, preparing, leading, serving... But some DCEs dread youth mission trips. Between fundraisers, hiccups in the planning process, and dealing with a lack of buy-in from students, parents, and congregation members, sometimes a youth mission trip seems like more work than it's worth.

As we discussed our goals for this issue, we kept coming back to a desire to encourage DCEs as they plan and prepare, revitalize their upcoming trips, and breathe new life into their youth ministries. In this issue, we pray you'll find tips and tricks that energize you to think about a new kind of youth mission trip, inspiration drawn from others' experiences, and a reminder that God is glorified as we serve our neighbors, near or far.

As you read through the ideas and advice below, we pray that this issue helps to ease some of the frustrations that can arise while planning youth mission trips, develop a greater love for this unique aspect of youth ministry, and ultimately, help prepare your students for a lifetime of faithful service to the One who served us through His life, death, and glorious resurrection.

With JOY in Jesus,

Michaela Seeliger

Editor



In This Issue...

Seeing the Value of Youth Mission Trips

Jolene Siebarth

Jolene shares her experience with youth mission trips over the past twenty-four years. From the challenges that arise to the life-change in students, Jolene shares why youth mission trips are a staple of her DCE ministry.

Building Servant Event Momentum

Anne Gonzalez

Anne gives her tips and tricks for creating service trips that have long-lasting effects. From simple to-dos and lifelong impacts, Anne shares the joy of how servant trips work to further the Kingdom of God and can build community at your church!

YouthWorks Mission Trips


Beth Stephens

YouthWorks is a mission organization that plans and prepares youth mission trips domestically and internationally. Beth has utilized YouthWorks and shares her experience and whether working with YouthWorks could be right for you!

DIY Youth Mission Trips

Michaela Seeliger

If you can't find a mission trip that best fits your group, just create your own! This is what Michaela did - created a mission trip specific to her youth and their passions. Read about her experience and how you could make this work for your group!



International Youth Mission Trips

Jennifer Edwards

Taking youth out of the country is daunting, but Jennifer provides encouragement for anyone interested in international youth mission trips. From the obstacles to the unexpected blessings, Jennifer shows a full picture of traveling internationally with youth!

Inspiring a Passion for Service

Ben Swafford

Service is FUN! Ben gives a picture of serving God in a variety of ways and how to pivot when God opens a door or closes one! Ben shares a glimpse into how our LCMS connections provide numerous opportunities to serve God and our neighbor.

Quarterly Question, Issue Notes

NADCE Editors

Discover the topic for the next issue and read the latest news from the NADCE Board.




Seeing the Value of Youth Mission Trips

Jolene Siebarth

I have had the blessing and honor of serving as a DCE for 24 years and during that time, I have been a part of serving with youth and leaders on mission trips to Idaho, Oklahoma, Florida, Texas, Maryland, Indiana, Colorado, Missouri, North Carolina, Michigan, Wisconsin, South Korea, Mexico and probably a few places I forgot. Over the years, these mission trips ranged from one-day events (such as at the LCMS Youth Gatherings and District events) to those lasting 7-14 days. Each experience brought joys and challenges, but the true blessing from each was the relationships that were formed between each of the youth, the youth and their leaders, groups from other churches, and those who were served... and most importantly, their relationship with Jesus.

When I was heading on my first mission trip back as a DCE Intern in Indiana, I didn't have a lot to do ahead of time. The church had already registered for the event; they had made plans and did all the work for the event to make things easy on the Intern that began in January of that year. However, I quickly learned there was a lot more to be taken into account. Flights had to be booked; I was the only adult attending from the church (not something that happens anymore and probably shouldn't have happened then), and I was still learning the ropes. I grew tremendously during that experience, learned many things NOT to do, the value of processing, saw the blessings in the unexpected, and was reminded that in all things, God is leading and guiding each and every journey.

To the question if youth mission trips are worth it, I give an emphatic YES! They are worth the long hours of preparing, fundraising, connecting, and communicating. The time spent with youth and leaders building community before, during, and after each trip is so valuable. The Bible studies and sharing time leading up to the mission trip, students getting up in front of the congregation and sharing the stories of how God worked before, during, and after the event, and all the "God-moments" throughout the year are part of the sights, sounds, and experiences that the students (and leaders!) will carry with them far beyond one week.




One of the joys of choosing a mission trip for your group is selecting one that fits with what you would like your group to experience. It could be leading VBS for children from group homes, it could be chopping firewood for families to fuel their homes for the winter, it could be visiting residents of nursing homes and care facilities, it could be painting and construction, it could be cleaning schools to help prepare them for the new school year... There are so many options and each is a way to serve.

Each morning, afternoon, and evening has opportunities for youth and leaders to gather for devotions, Bible studies, and community time. Time in God's Word is a central focus of all mission trips. Worship time focuses on the theme for the week and students and leaders grow in the knowledge of what it means to be a servant leader as they show love and care for God's people and His world. They learn what it means to love their neighbor, be a Christ-like servant leader, and the joy of making friends from other states as they serve together.

Over the years, I have had the joy and honor to see students grow from teens who observe to those who jump right in as leaders, volunteer to be the devotion leaders, ask to do the hard things, and serve as mentors to the younger students. They have grown not only in their skills as painters and teachers, but also in sharing their faith and as leaders. Students connect with adults during servant events who serve as mentors to them. The relationships that are formed through these acts of service are multigenerational and continue as the students and leaders return home. It is a joy to see adults and students seek each other out and connect at worship on Sundays and at events at their schools and in the community as a result of serving together on a mission trip.

When planning for a mission trip, start with prayer. Pray for God to show you the opportunity that would fit best with the needs of your group at that time and for the communities that will be served. Next, start with finding a date that works for the needs of the group. For us, that usually means we head out in June and start preparing 9-10 months ahead of time. We hold interest meetings with students and parents and go over the dates of the trip, how we are getting there, the cost, what we will be doing, and share



the main dates for fundraising and team building as well as any additional parent information dates. We have adult leader interest meetings and select the leadership team during the fall. The adult leaders take on key roles for the mission trip, including leading small groups, helping with fundraising, and communicating with families.

If you are considering taking your group on a mission trip this year or in the future, I would encourage you to check out the resources provided through LCMS Servant Events. They have a wide range of types of events and locations for groups to consider. They also offer servant event options for junior high students through adults and provide resources to help you as you plan and prepare. You can find more information at: <https://www.lcms-servantevents.org/>.

God's blessings as you plan and prepare to head out to serve with JOY side by side with students and leaders!



Jolene Siebarth is the DCE for Youth Ministry at Immanuel Lutheran Church and School in St. Charles, Missouri. She has been a DCE for 24 years at two congregations in Missouri. She is an avid University of Michigan football fan and enjoys traveling with youth on mission trips and has been on 11 LCMS Youth Gatherings as a participant, Young Adult Volunteer, CLB, and youth leader. She loves traveling for international mission trips and has had the joy of serving in Uganda, Nigeria, Egypt, and South Korea. Her favorite Bible passage comes from Psalm 27:1 – “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”

Building Servant Event Momentum

Anne Gonzalez


Less than a week before leading my first servant event as a DCE, I had a student drop out. He had a baseball tournament that conflicted with the event dates. Everyone I talked to indicated that he must have known about it earlier than he let on. Because it was so close to the event, there was no possibility of finding a replacement and no refund of the registration fees. It wasn't a very auspicious start to using mission trips as a part of ministry.

The first time I attempted to organize my own servant event without using an outside organization, we only had four students register from two churches. One of the students became so homesick halfway through that she had to be picked up during the event. I had to question whether the time and effort I put into creating the event was worth it.

Were these trips worth it? Absolutely. It would have been easy to give up after either of these experiences. In persevering through my first trip, I got to experience God pull a fractured youth group together cohesively and embrace me as their new youth leader. The second was the start of a multi-year string of events that encouraged our students to serve others in Christ's name. In my eleven years at my first call, our church sponsored one or two servant event trips each summer with the goal of helping students serve others and grow in faith.

Consistency

Consistently offering some sort of service opportunity each summer was one way we built buy-in from the students. Even in LCMS Gathering years, we still offered a four-day event that was also open to middle school students. Because it was short and affordably-priced, we were able to include high school youth who wanted to do both events or weren't able to attend the Gathering. Because servant events were a consistent part of youth ministry, it helped to build excitement and expectation from year to year.



Servant event trips were part of a consistent ministry helping parents buy in. That meant providing a safe environment, keeping parents informed, and being consistent with deadlines, communications, and the like were all part of building the trust necessary for them to say yes to the expense and commitment of a summer mission trip.


Demonstrating the value of the event was needed before *and* after each trip. Before the trip, a key part was talking about what we were going to be doing, why it was important, and how getting away from the daily routine can be helpful for spiritual growth. After the trip, helping teens debrief their experiences and share them with their families and the congregation was an important part of demonstrating value for the next year.

Tip: There were times that I had to have uncomfortable conversations with youth about doing something for someone that it appeared they could have been doing themselves. I wish I had read *When Helping Hurts* by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett years earlier for the perspective it offers on this subject. I recommend checking out this book before your next trip!

Start Them Young

One of the ways I started to build enthusiasm and buy-in was by creating a mission opportunity for younger students to be a part of. At that time, there were not many mission trips offered for junior high students, so I created my own four-day event in the Twin Cities. Partnering with DCE Martha Strong, who was serving a church nearby, we offered the creatively named "Twin Cities Servant Event " for several years running. By creating an event that was short, close to home, and very affordable, I had an easier time getting buy-in from parents. By giving youth their first taste of a servant event in middle school, I was able to build momentum for high school trips when there might be more competition for their time.

One unexpected surprise was when our first group of middle schoolers reached high school. They wanted to keep serving during the Twin Cities trip, so we had to make a decision: was this a trip for middle school students only or was it for all youth? We



decided that it was for all youth and so high school students became leaders and mentors to the younger students.

Connections

Most years, we incorporated sponsorship letters in the process of raising support for mission trips. Students would ask their family and friends to help sponsor their trip. While asking for financial support was part of the process, the letters also requested prayer support and/or a letter of encouragement. Students could also choose to ask church members they knew, so it was another way to build support in the congregation for the youth trips. Prayer supporters were provided with details about the trip and asked to pray throughout the trip. People who wanted to provide encouragement would send or email letters or notes to me ahead of time that I would present during daily “mail call” time.


Tip: If you’re having students write sponsorship letters, find or create a simple reference guide that shows exactly how to start and end a letter, how to address an envelope, and other letter skills. This may be the first time they’ve practiced this skill.

Importantly, we recognized all sponsors in the same way, regardless of the type of sponsorship. Many years, that meant that we had students write a brief postcard from the event that we mailed. Frankly, it was a pain to round up the postcards, stamps, and find time to get it done, but the personal touch was worth it in those relationships.

Another connection I aimed to strengthen through our trips was with the students' parents. I explicitly asked parents to provide a note for their child explaining what they hoped their child would get out of the trip. These would typically be the first notes of encouragement that I would present during the week.

Reporting

A critical part of building and keeping support on all levels was reporting on the trip after we returned. We typically had students present something of what they learned at a church service after the trip. This helped students have the opportunity to process what




they learned and be leaders. It provided parents and the congregation with a picture of the positive effects of the trip. The trip report also served as a soft recruiting tool as kids and their parents heard about the youth trip and grew up knowing that this was part of youth ministry at our church. Scheduling the weekend(s) for the trip report ahead of time was the best way to ensure that most of the youth could participate in one of the services. We often did it as a “take over” of the children’s message, where I was able to “interview” each of the youth about what they learned so that the kids (and the congregation) could hear about their experience.

Tip: Come up with your presentation plan before students depart for home at the end of the trip. Have them write something out or at least know what the questions are so that the presentation is mostly prepared.

My son just entered our church’s 7th grade youth program. As I am not currently serving a call to a parish, I’m now a parent looking in rather than the program leader. This has given me a vastly different perspective on the reasons that a family might have for opting out of overnight events. This may look like finding non-overnight service opportunities, inviting parents to join their students on trips, or finding solutions based on your specific youths’ needs.

In June 2022, I had the blessing of witnessing one of my former youth become an ordained pastor of the LCMS and receiving the Lord’s Supper from him. In conversation after the service, he mentioned that the first servant event trip that I led - the one I described at the beginning of the article from 16 years earlier - was instrumental in guiding him to his ultimate decision to enter the ministry. I’m sure there are some effects I will never know about, but we have God’s promise that He “works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” Romans 8:28 (NIV).





DCE Anne Gonzalez serves the LCMS Office of International Mission preparing volunteers for international service. She is also currently getting her master's degree in Learning Design and Technology from the University of San Diego. Her first call was to Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Onalaska, WI, where she served for 11 years. Anne lives in St. Louis with her husband, two children, and cat.



YouthWorks

Beth Stephens


In July of 2022, I took a group of high school students and adults on a mission trip to Louisville, Kentucky through YouthWorks, an organization that helps youth leaders by coordinating service opportunities for students. In reflecting on the experience, there are aspects of YouthWorks that were very helpful (especially as a first-time leader), things I wish could have been different, and parts that surprised me in a good way.

YouthWorks operates in 45 different communities, both domestic and international. Their headquarters are in Minnesota and offer trips for middle school, high school, and some mixed groups. While most of their trips are a typical week-long adventure over the summer, they also offer spring break trips and flexible start/end days.

The registration process is clear and laid out very plainly. I never encountered unexpected charges or communications. Everything was consistent, which was impressive considering we were only two years out of COVID. Trips average over \$400 per participant, so it is expensive, but some weeks have a discounted rate if your church timeline is flexible. Even though it is a large organization, their customer service was helpful and prompt.

One thing to note after our experience, and gathering from others' experiences, is that the onsite staff the week of your mission trip can be hit or miss. Most of the onsite staff are college students who receive a week or two of training and then are released to lead these weeks all summer. We served the last week of the summer and our staff had a difficult group the week prior; they were dealing with illness and burnout. Our first greeting onsite was not welcoming, but as the week went on, we developed a much better relationship with the staff. Going into the week with an open mind and lowering some of my expectations would have served my group and the staff in a better way.

The work sites in Louisville were incredible. We came from an urban context in Kansas City, but our students were still exposed to a different culture and history of the



community. One of the other church groups we served alongside during our week was from a small town in Iowa. It led to great discussions as they were exposed to the amount of need in a big city. The sites varied from nonprofits that directly served the needs of the people in the city to sites that provided aid internationally. Students got to directly engage with the residents they were serving at some locations and had the opportunity to engage with people who were passionate about serving others. We did not have to bring any supplies or tools with us to participate, which was convenient. As a DCE from a different city without connections to the city of Louisville, I would not have been able to put together the sites that YouthWorks arranged for us.

We served alongside two other church groups during the week. We were partnered with one church, and the third church served independently. Serving with the other church was an overall very positive experience for the students. The groups bonded and the adults did too! It was cool to see relationships forming throughout the week, and I still hear updates about the students from Iowa every so often since the students have stayed in touch! While serving with YouthWorks, working with other groups is an element totally out of the control of the adult leader. You could end up on a week with cranky groups or groups with less-than-ideal leaders. I recommend being open to what God puts together and seeing what conversations are started.

The first night was overwhelming and intense because the YouthWorks leaders have structured and pre-written content they must inform all participants of before we can start serving the next morning. That content includes an intense agreement about unwanted physical touch and provides strict rules restricting “full-frontal hugs.” I understand that in our world now it is important for the organization to do everything in its power to protect the participants and those we serve as best as it can. Now that I know that information, I would be able to prepare the students and leaders much better for what that first night will look like.

Who should choose YouthWorks as a mission trip option?



YouthWorks serves our group well because they take care of a lot of the details of sites, tools, and food prep. They plan fun activities and meaningful devotions. Their staff have relationships with the sites and the organization values long-term engagement with the communities they serve. If you are a youth leader who does not have experience in mission trips, manual labor, or a large support network, I think YouthWorks is a great option. However, in choosing YouthWorks, you concede a lot of control. You do not get to pick the groups who serve alongside you, the site leaders, or what sites you visit. The days are strictly scheduled, and for things to go smoothly, you must respect that order. For more experienced youth leaders or leaders who want to target specific outcomes, YouthWorks might not be for them. Personally, I loved how much I got to engage in the work alongside my students instead of being the person who had to organize all the details. We experienced things together and problem-solved along the way. All the students who went with our group had a positive experience, and we will be using YouthWorks again for our mission trip in 2024!



Beth Stephens has served as the Youth Family Minister at Trinity Lutheran Church in Shawnee/Mission, Kansas for the past five years. She graduated from Concordia University Nebraska with her DCE certification and since has served in Michigan and Kansas. Beth spends her free time with friends and family, in a kayak on a lake, or some combination of the two!



DIY Youth Mission Trip

Michaela Seeliger


The Idea

Over the years, I've been on plenty of youth mission trips and servant events, but our recent youth ministry mission trips left something to be desired. I struggled to think of a different kind of trip that would interest my students, help those in need, and strengthen the faith of my students. After attending a Y4Life Summit held by Lutherans for Life in Austin, TX, several of my students developed an interest in life issues - so much so that they came up with the idea of a life-themed mission trip for the following summer. Since something like this didn't already exist, I knew I'd be starting from scratch. I'd need to plan countless details, such as when and where we'd go, who we'd serve, where we'd stay, fundraising, lesson planning, etc... And so the DIY youth mission trip was born!

While we were at the Y4Life Summit we met Jeannine, the leader of Breath of Life Maternity Ministries (BOL), and my students quickly connected with her and the type of ministries BOL leads. Because they were so interested in Breath of Life, returning to Austin was an easy decision.

Be Flexible As You Plan

Creating your own mission trip comes with a lot of freedom. You aren't bound to a certain organization's preset schedule, and the sky's the limit in regards to where and how you might serve. However, with this freedom, you must be flexible as you plan. My original idea was that for our four days of service, we'd serve eight different organizations that upheld God's gift of life throughout all ages and stages - one each morning and one each afternoon. I knew my first phone call would be to Breath of Life Maternity Ministries, and when I offered our help for half a day, they asked if we could stay all day instead. I agreed since we already had a relationship with their organization. When I called the assisted living home I had a relationship with in Austin, their activities coordinator started planning a whole day for our students before I even had the chance to tell her my ideas. When I got in touch with the Food Bank of Central Texas, they happily agreed to let us serve in the morning, but then said they were still short 40+ volunteers for that afternoon



too. By that point, I clearly understood that God had different plans for how we were going to spend our time during our mission trip. Letting the plan evolve as these organizations expressed their needs allowed us to serve more effectively.


Get the Congregation Involved

While this was a *youth* mission trip, I had so many adults from the congregation tell me how much they loved the idea of this trip and how they wanted to tag along with the high school students. Those comments sparked the idea to engage them in our service. I contacted the organizations we'd be serving to see what kind of donations they were needing at the time, then I made those needs known to the congregation. For weeks leading up to the trip, students who were planning to attend the mission trip worked at a donation table on Sundays where congregation members brought boxes of diapers, gift cards, and shelf-stable food items. Our congregation enjoyed the opportunity to support our youth as they served, but also appreciated the opportunity to join in and serve alongside them - even from home!

Build on a Connection

While serving at Breath of Life, we worked almost entirely outdoors (on perhaps the hottest summer day in Texas history). The kids were worn out quickly, but it was encouraging to watch them persevere in their work. Later that evening, the youth all shared that their motivation to continue working so hard was simple: they were able to see the fruit of their labors. One of the young expectant mothers living at their maternity home spent the whole day with us. The students visited with her and learned that she was having a girl and she was due in just a couple of weeks. The students all expressed that they kept working so hard, because they knew their work benefitted that mother and her baby. The personal connection not only motivated the students that day but also later in the week.

We spent the last day of the trip at the local food bank sorting vegetables and checking expiration dates. My students were not initially excited, but when they learned that Breath of Life received most of their food from the food bank we were going to serve, my students' attitudes completely changed.



A couple of weeks after our trip, that mother gave birth to her sweet baby girl. I sent the picture of the mom and baby to the youth, and we had a prayer for them over group text. It was such a blessing to see my students serve so diligently and pray so faithfully for their new friends at Breath of Life, even weeks after our trip was over.


Be Flexible As You Serve

On the day we were scheduled to spend the day at an assisted living home, we woke up to a big surprise. The house we were staying at ran on a water well system, and the reservoir ran dry overnight, leaving us without any water! This was a tough way to start this day of service, but God redeemed it in a way that only He can. When we arrived at the assisted living home, the students jumped in ready to work on brain games and an exercise class with the residents. They were helpful, considerate, and eager to serve. After lunch, the majority of the group joined the residents for board games while one of the students and I went to the memory care unit where my student showed compassion and patience to the residents as we helped them paint with watercolors. At the end of the day, we joined in on a singalong where the students brought so much joy to the residents.

I had planned for us to process the day when we got home, but the conversation couldn't wait. We got into the van and the students erupted in stories, questions, and ideas of how to continue serving when we returned home. Processing in the parking lot was not what I had planned, but it showed me their passion for serving the elderly.

Since we've returned home, we've served each month at a similar home where some of our congregation's shut-ins live. The students all agree that playing Bingo with the elderly is their new favorite way to serve.

As you think about opportunities for your own youth to serve, I encourage you to consider creating your own youth mission trip. While there is certainly a lot of work and planning involved, joy abounds when it all comes together and your students have the



opportunity “to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).



Michaela Seeliger serves on the NADCE Quarterly Team as Editor. She currently serves as DCE at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Wichita Falls, TX.



International Youth Mission Trips


Jennifer Edwards

Cross-Cultural Ministry, particularly short-term trips, can be challenging. International mission trips are often more expensive than domestic trips, require more travel time, and are met with mixed views on their benefit or potential harm to local communities. However, from my experience, these challenges are worth the effort, but I may be a little biased.

I spent two years living in Slovakia for my DCE Internship after college. I had spent the majority of my four years in college telling people I was going to move to Germany, but God had different plans. While I decided to follow God's call back to America for a more traditional parish DCE position after my internship, cross-cultural ministry holds a huge part of my heart.

This past summer, July 2023, I was able to lead a small group from my current congregation to serve for a week at Kids Camp with my previous congregation in Slovakia. Part of what I believe made this trip possible and successful was the prior relationship I had with that congregation and ministry. It was cool to see some of the kids I taught in the Lutheran Preschool remember me four years later.

While there was a prior relationship, and the person I was planning and coordinating with in Slovakia was a very dear friend of mine, this trip and its preparation weren't without difficulties. The biggest challenge was the difference in our cultures. For many reasons in American parish ministry, we do a lot of planning ahead, especially for a first-time international trip, however, that's not typically the case in Slovakia. Trying to get a date for the trip in the timeline my congregation wanted was very difficult, because it was about two to three months earlier than the church in Slovakia would have normally decided something like this. This also came up with trying to prepare our English lessons; my schedule is typically lighter in the summer, but I didn't have daily themes that far in advance to work ahead.




These things can be difficult, especially if the congregation is expecting the type of decisions like Americans typically do. This requires further explanation of the culture so that leadership and congregation members understand the process. It's also a good lesson in patience! When it came to planning English lessons, the other adult on the trip homeschooled her kids and helped teach in their co-op, so she had lots of experience with lesson planning and teaching a wide range of ages. Lean on the skills of the congregation members to help with preparations, even if they're not joining you on the trip.

Despite some of the planning and scheduling challenges, it was all worth it. The three youth who came on the trip had never left the country, so there were a lot of learning hurdles for them to overcome, but they came back with a broader outlook on life and the world. They learned that relationships can be built despite language barriers when we have the love of Christ motivating us. They saw the power of community and learned that we're not all that different from other people around the world. The entire team is planning on returning next summer.

One of the ways short-term cross-cultural mission trips can be done well is by returning to the same location to continue building relationships. Returning can also help participants learn new things about the local culture and language to continue overcoming some of those challenges. In this particular situation, many of the adult and teen volunteers with the camp spoke English, but didn't know how to teach it to the kids. It was so fun to see the kids using the words they learned in English to try and get the boys to play with them, and if that didn't work, they would just go and drag one of the Slovak adults over to translate for them. They were determined kids!

One of the major challenges of going overseas for a mission trip is cost. As an example, I'll describe how my congregation broke down the costs. The participants were expected to pay for their plane tickets while the remaining costs would come out of my mission trip budget. This included transportation from the airport to the city we were serving in, food during travel days, English lesson supplies, and baggage fees. The congregation we served with housed us and fed us, so that was not a cost we had to cover.



I think a big benefit to this trip was the fact that I had lived in that city and worked with those people for two years. It's another home to me. Parents were more at ease sending their kids because I was confident in the entire process and the people we were working with. That may not be the case for everyone, however, having any sort of strong connection with the people you will be serving with is vital and I think puts a lot of parents' minds at ease. I had a lot of conversations with the parents of the kids who would be attending and made sure to keep the line of communication open with them throughout the entire trip. Relationships really are the foundation of ministry.

One resource I would highly recommend for preparing for a cross-cultural mission trip is the book *Serving with Eyes Wide Open* by David A Livermore. It will help you and your team begin to view this experience and your cross-cultural interactions in a whole new light.

God's blessings on any future cross-cultural mission trips you have in the works or are dreaming about. I am confident you won't regret it!



Jennifer Edwards is the Director of Family Ministry at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Palatine, IL. Prior to moving to Illinois, she served for two years in Zilina, Slovakia teaching English to preschoolers and serving with the youth group and confirmation at the local Lutheran church. She has a passion for travel, cross-cultural ministry, and being an aunt to her five nephews!

Inspiring a Passion for Service


Ben Swafford

Ever since high school, I have had a passion for mission trips, especially mission trips designed for teenagers. From my high school experience, and then reinforced through my experience as a DCE serving in student ministry, this is typically a huge step out of a teenager's comfort zone, and possibly the first time they decide to "go" as they serve the Lord. There is always an awkwardness being thrown into the mix of peers from other churches, states, or even countries, that is quickly morphed into teamwork and dedication. I haven't experienced an event that can turn total strangers into a family within a few days quite like a mission trip can.

I have had the opportunity to plan and lead approximately a dozen week-long mission trips in my six years as a DCE post-internship. For my first few mission trips, I worked through different websites to read about and register for trips. I'd create a packet of trips for my Student Leadership Team to review, and we'd eventually vote to determine where we'd go. Over the years, fewer and fewer options became available, then, of course, all trips in 2020 were canceled, but we still had a strong desire to serve, even during a pandemic. So we decided to do our research, reach out to different contacts, and make a plan.

By God's guidance, we ended up having two mission trip opportunities that summer, one at a local Colorado camp, Lutheran Valley Retreat, and one hosted by our church (Trinity Lutheran in Franktown, CO) and a few families in our congregation. From building a retention wall for a week at the camp to putting together blessing bags and building benches at Trinity, we had successfully completed two mission trips and were eager to send more teams to servant events and mission trips.

There was a cool aspect of picking a different mission trip every summer, based on student interests and votes, but it still felt like something was missing. This past summer in July 2023, our team returned to a camp we had served at before, Shoshone Mountain Retreat in Idaho, a NLOMA camp that leads Idaho Servant Adventures (ISA), which brings




teams to camp with the sole purpose of going into the surrounding communities. Shoshone's ISA Director, Clint Kunze, does an incredible job preparing teams to be the hands and feet of Jesus, as well as preparing the community to accept the mission teams with open arms. Our plan was to put this particular mission opportunity on a three-year rotation, along with the Youth Gathering and one more mission trip that was still to be determined.

On the drive north, a few of the leaders and I were talking about how to create a larger impact with the camp, our mission team, and the church in Billings, Montana that was letting us sleep in their youth center. We had come up with a few different ideas and figured we could reach out to our contact in Billings (Jonathan Boll) after the trip, but God had another plan. After the Saturday evening worship service in Billings, we learned that the Youth Center air conditioner was broken... during the hottest week of the year. At that moment the Boll family invited our mission team to stay at their home. Talk about a mission-minded family! After some discussion and hesitation, we accepted. Thanks be to God that we did.

We got to know their family, hear about their mission trip experiences, their ministry passions, and found about a dozen LCMS connections. The next morning, Jonathan and I decided that we could partner with them on a trip that their church leads to the Muddy Cluster Community in Montana. God introduced us to new partnerships, strengthened relationships, and opened a door for future mission trips using a broken air conditioning unit, and it was only the second travel day of our mission trip. So cool!

Having the opportunity to serve in Montana every three years to continue to build a connection between Trinity Franktown and Trinity Billings was such an amazing experience. That did, however, mean that my idea of putting a local Colorado high school trip in our rotation would have to shift. It just so happened that our first-ever DCE Summer Intern, Abi Hilpert, was on this trip and also shares a passion for missions. She knew I had been wanting to do a middle school mission trip for a while and on the trip, we decided it would be pretty cool to have our DCE Summer Interns lead a middle school trip each summer. Let the planning begin...




The LCMS is truly blessed by the Kunze family, their fire for Christ, and their passion for Outdoor Education Ministry. One of Clint Kunze's younger brothers, Trevor Kunze, is one of the founders and the Chief Executive Officer of Three Trees Outdoor Ministry. You have to love these LCMS connections! Three Trees is located in northern Colorado and loves hosting mission teams. God opened yet another door for another mission team to live out their calling to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28).

I've learned over the years that God doesn't just *open* doors; He also closes them. It's not always easy to see the reason in the moment, but after time and conversation with Him, there is usually an answer. I've had a number of mission opportunities get canceled or simply not come together. I've been overly stressed planning mission trips and trying to nail down all of the logistics. Any youth director, DCE, or student ministry leader knows that working with teens and preteens can be difficult, especially while trying to get commitments, payments, and forms collected for a trip six to nine months away. God's guidance, purpose, and planning are always, *always*, greater than our own.

Two of my greatest joys from leading mission trips are what I call "the deep nights" and the desire to want to do more, both of which involve the Holy Spirit. The deep nights are those heavier Bible studies, campfires, or lesson times, usually held during one of the last two nights of a trip when there are a few more tears and one-on-one conversations than before. I love these moments because there seems to be a breakdown and buildup of students all at the same time. We get a glimpse of a raw moment of wrestling with what God is doing in their lives at that moment.

I also really love seeing my students processing their desire to do more. While this usually results from an amazing week of serving and having a mountaintop experience, the desire to do more is real all the same. For my mission teams, this is where the return van ride conversations, following up with a coffee chat, and presenting different ideas and opportunities to serve are imperative. From these moments, God has led a number of my high school and college students to come back and lead the younger students. We have high school students who help lead middle school youth, as well college students and young adults who have transitioned into leading the high school students. Our young




leaders are always eager to learn what other mission trip opportunities are coming up. It seems like God is opening yet another door for another group of missionaries to serve.

The cool thing about ministry is that it's a team sport. Obviously, we have the best Coach in the world in Jesus Christ. We are never alone in ministry, even in those moments when we feel like it. Ministry is hard and can be extremely stressful at times, especially trying to plan a trip for summer when you're in the thick of fall programming. Reach out to other DCEs, youth directors, and student ministry leaders for ideas, advice, and resources. When I first started planning mission trips, I made a number of calls and sent way too many emails to my DCE, Becky Krentz, and one of my Concordia University Texas professors, Pat Fick.

If you haven't led a mission trip yet, do it! If you have no idea where to start, ask a friend for advice. If you don't know where to start, talk to God and talk with your students. Start small with a servant event or a weekend trip, then build up to the bigger trips. Not every trip is going to be wonderful, but every single trip will have a wonderful moment where we feel God's presence. The amazing thing about a mission trip, or any moment of evangelism, is that the Holy Spirit is doing all of the work and we just get to be a part of the amazing story of redemption and grace. Praise God!

Jesus tells us, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields" (Luke 10:2 NLT).

Special thanks to Becky and Paul Krentz who took me on my first mission trip and many after, Pat Fick who showed me what it means to truly love a community and connected me to AMC, Dr. Jacob Youmans for his instruction in class and through his books on how to be truly missional, all of our mission partners across the world who create easier opportunities to serve, and, of course, Jesus for showing us what it means to go.





Ben Swafford is the lucky husband of Hannah (who is an amazing teacher at LuHi Parker), blessed father to Cooper, a wild two-year-old adventurer, and the DCE at Trinity Lutheran Church & School in Franktown, CO. As a DCE, he loves joining others on their faith walk, challenging them to think outside of the box, encouraging them to step out of their comfort zone when it comes to serving others, and growing with them all along the way. A Bible verse that he holds close to his heart is Philippians 2:10 which reads, “at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow...”. In the highlights and low points of life, this verse reminds him that nothing is too big for Jesus Christ or those whom He has called.



Quarterly Question


What have been your most successful fundraisers?

Tara Darling: For those in areas where Kwik Trip is prevalent, their car wash card fundraiser is AWESOME! So easy, a great deal for those who buy them, and \$16 profit per card sold. They make great gifts if you can plan the fundraiser before Christmas!

Annie Tiberg Anderson: Trivia nights!

Kelly Buckwalter: Envelope Wall - we have an incredibly supportive and generous congregation and they respond really well to this. We only do it once every three years, the January before the NYG.

Spencer Owen: At my previous call I purchased mini M&Ms in the tubes from Sam's, which our youth put labels on them raising awareness that we were raising money for the Youth Gathering. Youth passed them out to everyone (kids and adults) on a Sunday morning as people were leaving. The labels asked people to keep our group in prayer and if they're were able they could donate their filled tubes with cash, check, or coins (we had a bucket manned for the next two Sundays). It was incredibly well received and we raised quite a bit of money in a couple of weeks with minimal work (and the congregation loved the ease of the fundraiser, too!) I used a Thrivent card to help offset the cost of the M&Ms.




Jonathan Guse: Anywhere in midwest that has a Mike's Carwash or Crew Carwash, they have a fundraiser program, and it always faired very well for us at my previous call. Christmas was a great time for stocking stuffers and we also did it before Father's Day with success.

Coming in Our Next Issue:

In our next issue, we'll be highlighting the NADCE Conference! If you're planning to attend the conference, we'd love to hear from you! If you'd like to contribute to the Winter issue, please contact the editors with your proposal by December 15th at nadceeditors@gmail.com.

Notes from the NADCE Board

- *You can still register for the NADCE Conference being held January 31-February 2, 2024 in Houston, Texas! We hope you'll "Make Space" on your calendar for this stellar event and look forward to our time together. Many thanks to the planning team for all their hard work!*
 - *Have you listened to [NADCE's podcasts](#)? One more episode will launch this year, and then stay tuned for mini devotional podcasts throughout the Advent season reflecting on the theme "A Weary World Rejoices."*
 - *Watch your inbox for our annual report reflecting on NADCE's work and mission throughout 2023 and looking ahead to 2024.*
- 

NADCE Quarterly Editing Team

Allie Parkhurst, Assistant Editor

Allie Parkhurst graduated from Concordia University Nebraska in 2015 and Concordia University Irvine in 2022 and currently serves as Director of Youth Ministry at Peace Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Working with 6th-12th grade students, Allie especially loves the raw honesty and unrestrained joy of her middle and high school students in Confirmation and youth group.

Allie spends her free time reading as many novels as possible, talking with friends across the country, thrift shopping, and wedding planning with her fiance Adam!



Michaela Seeliger, Editor

Michaela Seeliger graduated from Concordia University Texas in 2016 and now serves as Director of Christian Education at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Wichita Falls, TX where she enjoys working with children, youth, and family ministries. She especially loves VBS, confirmation ministry, and helping equip parents to teach the faith at home.

Michaela enjoys spending time with her family and friends, reading, and gardening. Although Texas has been her home for many years now, Michaela will always consider herself an Oklahoma girl.

