



WHAT TO EXPECT SERVING IN *Large Urban Communities*

YouthWorks has been facilitating mission trips for over 30 years now, and we are continually confronted with the fact that real service cannot happen outside the context of relationships. We desire for students, Adult Leaders and staff to learn that people matter, attitudes are important, and the posture of our hearts determines how we connect with others. The reality is that every community has a distinctive story, including both strengths and struggles.

Our hope is that through your experience in a large urban community you will:

- *increase your awareness of life in an urban area*
 - *reflect on the impact that you can have in your own community*
 - *feel connected to the people and places you serve, dispelling any stereotypes or fears*
 - *deepen the way you think about God, your neighbors and yourselves.*
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LIFE IN A LARGE URBAN COMMUNITY

Life in a big city keeps moving. It's always morphing into something different, which can make serving in the city difficult. While one neighborhood is transitioning into a thriving business district, another is sliding into decay and poverty. Because urban areas are such diverse environments, it's not hard to feel flooded with a sensory overload. The sights, sounds and smells of the city can easily overwhelm the most seasoned traveler. Population density is much higher in the city, so there are always more people, more shops, more cars... more everything.

As you serve in urban areas, you may encounter cultural and ethnic diversity, various levels of poverty and the challenges that come from a lot of people living in a small area. You will also experience the way this blend creates unique pockets of community within the larger city. Because of these factors, you'll find that the stereotypes you've held about certain kinds of people may not necessarily hold true. We invite you to join us as we continue to let go of preconceptions and interact with people as they are and not as we expect them to be.

As you prepare, ask your group these questions:

- What are some ways culture or ethnicity impact our faith, ministry and relationships?
- How is your culture similar or different to the culture of the community you will serve?
- What are some stereotypes you might have about the community you are visiting? How might these be misconceptions?

SERVING IN A LARGE URBAN COMMUNITY

At YouthWorks, we have learned that there are a number of typical reactions you and your group may experience as you step into this type of community. We share these with you so you know what to expect and so you understand that it's normal to have these feelings.

Driving takes longer. Sometimes people enjoy this because they get to see more. Sometimes people get stressed out. Sometimes it just makes people feel tired. Slow traffic and occasionally getting lost are part of visiting an urban area. Your patience on the road will help you and your passengers feel safe.

Schedules feel fuller. Serving at multiple service sites during the day can make the schedule feel packed with an added transition during the day. While the schedule may seem full, don't miss this opportunity to appreciate the diversity of places you and your students will experience in the city.

It feels like a lot of people. It is hard to find a quiet oasis in the city, and this can be challenging when you're in the middle of the trip. On the other hand, there's an energy about urban areas that can be invigorating. Large groups of people create an excitement different than in other types of communities.

Opinions are more vocal. In an urban area, typically there is a higher prevalence of activism and social justice initiatives. Be patient and respectful of community members sharing their voices and opinions- even if they differ from yours.

We hope that this information helps as you continue to prepare for your trip. Please take time to talk with your group about expectations about the type of community you will be serving. Groups who have intentionally taken time to process and prepare before they go on their trip have more meaningful individual growth, team solidarity and community relationships.

Being like Jesus in this Community

Urban areas are complex and dynamic places. It's easy for all of us to label a city and its people with all sorts of stereotypes. These labels feed our perceptions and influence how we approach people, situations and relationships. As you prepare, think about how you will approach each person and situation with the kind of grace that Jesus demonstrated to each person he met along the way. The following characteristics¹ are great examples of how your students and Adult Leaders can prepare their hearts for their mission week.

Serve with Humility

Jesus came to earth with the attitude of a servant. Jesus did not come as a powerful king, but as a powerless infant and later in life a carpenter. If you want to serve others, have a humble attitude. Become a servant focused on listening instead of speaking and learning instead of teaching. Come with a humble heart that is ready to jump in and serve wherever needed, whether it's cleaning a bathroom or listening to a life story. Come ready to put the needs of those you serve above your own.

Don't Depend on Privilege

Jesus had access to privilege and wealth, but he voluntarily chose poverty instead. Your time in this community may feel like poverty. The sleeping arrangements are probably less comfortable than you have at home, the food may not be what you prefer, and the temperature may be uncomfortable. Our hope is that this week of service will remind you to depend more on Jesus by living outside convenience and, sometimes, going without.

Encounter Brokenness

Jesus stepped out of the order and harmony of heaven into the disorder and brokenness of Earth. You are called to do the same. You will encounter brokenness during your time in the community. God is calling you to be present among the broken, not to draw conclusions or judge. Instead, open your eyes wide to the needs around you, both in your YouthWorks community and back home.

¹Muriu, O. (2009, December 29). *Pace and place of missions today. Urbana Conference 2009*. Retrieved on January 28, 2011, from <http://www.intervarsity.org/page/urbana-09- audio>