



## Youth Opportunities

### Activity 1

**Recommended ages:** Elementary

**Purpose:** To demonstrate that youth can help feed a lot of people who are hungry each month.

**Brief Description of Activity:** By visually understanding the large number of people who need food from the United Ministries pantry each month, youth will be motivated to collect a lot of food, bring it to United Ministries, stock it on the shelves, and pack a few bags to be given away.

**What to do beforehand:** Call United Ministries (Davida at 335-2608 or Brian at 335-2610) to find out how many people received food from the Emergency Assistance pantry in the previous month. Fill a jar with that number of marbles.

Ask children to guess the number of marbles in the jar. Depending on the guess, indicate whether the number is high or low. You might want to give prize for the person who guesses the correct number.

**What happens at United Ministries:** When you arrive at United Ministries, a staff person will talk about the marbles and what they represent, give a brief description of United Ministries and the people served, and facilitate the youths' work in the pantry. We will thank the youth for all their efforts in collecting food to help people who are hungry.

**Time requirement:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

### Activity 2

**Recommended ages:** Elementary, even kindergarten. The structure can be done by all ages.

**Purpose:** To collect food for United Ministries pantry in order to feed people who are hungry.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth will collect food using a variety of "clever" ideas to promote the collection. Youth will bring the food to United Ministries, place it on the shelves, and pack bags to be given out. A staff member will introduce them to United Ministries Emergency Assistance program and the pantry.

**What to do beforehand:** Ask children to collect specific items for food pantries and then make it fun. For example:

- *Green eggs and spam* could focus on canned meats. You could use a lot of Dr. Seuss books and allusions.
- *Beans, beans, who's got the beans?* can use a guessing game and encourage donations of dried and canned beans.
- *Going on a picnic* can be used in conjunction with an actual picnic for the children. It focuses on collecting peanut butter, jelly, and crackers.
- *Potty time* appeals to younger children's fascination with all things of the bathroom. Donations might be toilet paper or diapers.

- *Good morning to you, good morning to you* can use the children's song to highlight the need for breakfast cereals, powdered milk, and juice cans or boxes.

Collect canned goods and build a structure with them within or near the worship space. Allow the structure to be visible to the congregation over several Sundays. Encourage all members to provide canned goods so the kids can create something impressive.

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff person will receive the donations, orient the youth to United Ministries and Emergency Assistance, help the children put their donation on the shelves of the pantry, and help them pack bags to be given away.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

### **Activity 3**

**Recommended ages:** Elementary

**Purpose:** To collect towels for homeless to use at the Place of Hope.

**What happens beforehand:** Plan "creative ways" to collect and display towels. A couple of suggestions are:

- Create a curtain across a room by using a clothesline with towels pinned to it. Ask the children to contribute the towels, used or new. Ask the children to "perform" by singing, dancing, or doing a skit.
- Create a "tent" using towels or sheets donated by the children. Gather within the tent for story time.

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff member will talk with the children about homelessness and why towels are so important. Then the staff member will take the youth on a tour of the Place of Hope.

**Time requirement:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

### **Activity 4**

**Recommended ages:** All ages

**Purpose:** To collect needed winter items for people who live in poverty.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth decorate a tree with basic items people who live in poverty might need and bring those items to United Ministries.

**What happens beforehand:** Set up a tree during the winter holidays and decorate it with donated gloves, mittens, and scarves.

**What happens at United Ministries:** Youth will bring the items to United Ministries. A staff member will talk with them about the importance of their gifts and how they will be used. The youth will tour the facilities of United Ministries.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

## **Activity 5**

**Recommended ages:** All ages

**Purpose:** We rarely realize how dependent we are on all kinds of people. This exercise helps us see that our lives are enriched by many other people in ways we often do not think about.

**Brief description of activity:** By talking about all the people involved with producing a bag of potato chips, we begin to realize how many people enrich our lives. This helps youth develop empathy for all kinds of people.

**What to do beforehand:** No requirements

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff person will place a bag of potato chips on a table in the middle of the group. Then say: "Look at this bag of chips. Let's think about how many people were involved in making this bag of chips available to us today." The staff leader will ask the group to list everyone who was involved in making this bag of chips available to each person in the group.

Answers will include: farmers, pickers, truckers, processors, grocery stores. Then the group will be encouraged to dig further: what kinds of functions/jobs on the farm were required for us to have this bag of chips? The owner, the purchaser of seeds, the mechanic which keeps the equipment running, the field workers, the people who build the boxes or shipping containers, etc. The processing plant will have the computer engineers, the housekeepers to keep the plant clean, the chemists who develop the "recipes," the human resources people who hire the workers, etc. Even before that, universities will have professors and students who explore ways to produce better and better potatoes, etc. There will be graphic artists designing the bag, advertisers convincing us that this bag of chips is better than another. Could there be as many as 100 people involved?

The youth will talk about how important each of these people are to every person who enjoys a bag of chips. Ask: "Do we equally value each one of the people involved in the process of our bag of chips? Why or why not?"

The staff person will lead a discussion about the interconnectedness of people, our caring for each other, how each person is important to our own personal enjoyment of life, etc. The youth will be asked: "Does anyone have anything else to add or to question? Does anyone have any suggestions for how we can improve our appreciation and treatment of people who are important to our livelihood and whom we have neglected to think about?"

Then the youth will tour the facilities of United Ministries.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** Donation requested

## **Activity 6**

**Recommended ages:** All ages

**Purpose:** To engage youth in raising funds to help people who are poor.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth will learn about a fundraising walk that helps people who are poor. They will brainstorm ways to fully engage their fundraising and walk experience.

**What to do beforehand:** Commit to walking in the Walk 4 the Homeless.

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff person talks about homelessness and tells about the importance of the Walk 4 the Homeless. The youth are told about some of the agencies and organizations that are located along the walk route so that they can begin to understand the impact of the needs of people who are homeless.

The staff person will help the youth brainstorm about ways they can engage others to support their walk efforts. They may develop a plan for making signs, recruiting walkers, and obtaining contributions.

The youth will take a tour of the facilities of United Ministries.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

## **Activity 7**

**Recommended ages:** All ages

**Purpose:** To beautify areas for people who may have little beauty in their lives.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth will plant foliage and flowers around the United Ministries property to provide spots of beauty.

**What to do beforehand:** Obtain plants through purchase or donation. Be sure to research the kinds of plants that might be best for the area. (For even more impact, commit to maintaining the plants by watering them, pruning them, etc.) Bring appropriate gardening tools.

**What happens at United Ministries:** Youth plant the foliage and flowers. A staff member will meet with the youth to orient them to United Ministries.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** Depends on the size of the project

**Cost:** Cost of the plants

## **Activity 8**

**Recommended ages:** Elementary and middle school

**Purpose:** To help youth connect with homeless individuals by providing a resource for a basic need.

**Brief Description of activity:** Youth will collect socks to be given to homeless people. They will bring the socks to United Ministries where they will learn from a staff member about homelessness and tour the Place of Hope.

**What to do beforehand:** Ask the youth to collect new socks to be given to homeless adults.

**What happens at United Ministries:** When the youth bring their socks, a staff member will ask them to give a name to the socks they are donating and then explain: "These socks will be given to people who are homeless who may not have nice socks. Since you cannot pray\* for these people by name, we asked you to name the socks instead. That way when you pray for your socks, you are praying for the person who received them."

Then the staff member will give a brief discussion of homelessness in Greenville and take the youth on a tour of the Place of Hope.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

\*For non-religious settings, we will say, “We’d like to send caring thoughts to each of these people by name...”

## **Activity 9**

**Recommended ages:** Older elementary and middle school

**Purpose:** To help youth connect with people in need in a significant way.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth will use prescribed questions to “interview” program participants at United Ministries. Afterward they will create “books” based on their interviews and give them to the interviewees.

**What to do beforehand:** Arrange with a nonprofit for children to “interview” program participants. (Note: the agency will explain the project to their participants and choose people appropriate for this project.) Devise a few questions that the children will ask such as:

What is your favorite food?

What is your favorite color?

What makes you happy?

Do you have a favorite song/story/television show/team? What is it?

What was your happiest day?

After the visit to United Ministries and the interviews, help the children make books that can be given to the program participants who agreed to be part of the project. The books can be individualized for each interviewee or they can be a summation of all the interviews. Suggest that the children draw pictures that illustrate some of the things they learned and/or take photos of the interviewee that can be included in the books as well.

Older youth may simply write an essay about their experience and share it with their family, school, or church.

**What happens at United Ministries:** The organization will choose program participants appropriate for this activity. It will arrange a place for the children to conduct the interviews in pairs. A staff member will debrief the youth about the exercise.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** One hour

**Cost:** Production costs for the books you make

## **Activity 10**

**Recommended ages:** Older elementary and middle school

**Purpose:** To collect toiletry items that homeless people might need for basic hygiene.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth use a creative way to collect toiletry items that homeless people need. They bring the items to United Ministries’ day shelter for people who are homeless—the Place of

Hope.

**What to do beforehand:** Plan a scavenger hunt listing all the items that one might need to take a shower or get cleaned up in the morning. The list can include: towel, washcloth, soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, disposable razor, spray deodorant, body lotion, comb, etc.

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff member accepts the donations and asks students to sort them and place them in the storage room. The staff talks with the youth about homelessness and introduces them to the Place of Hope.

**Time requirement:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

## **Activity 11**

**Recommended ages:** Older elementary, middle school, and high school (14- Maximum number for the van)

**Purpose:** To show youth some of the blighted neighborhoods and decrepit housing in our community.

**Brief description of activity:** A United Ministries staff person drives a van member through neighborhoods and narrates what the participants are seeing.

**What to do beforehand:** No requirements

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff member takes youth on a bus tour through neighborhoods to demonstrate certain conditions in our community.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 1.5 hours

**Cost:** \$5 a person

<http://www.lovingourneighborbook.com>.

## **Activity 12**

**Recommended ages:** Middle and high school (ideal number is 10-20 students)

**Purpose:** “The I Want to Work” simulation is an interactive learning experience for youth that addresses the complexities of getting a job, especially for low-income and homeless people in our community.

**Brief description of activity:** Participants draw 6 cards that define their education level, health, transportation, identification, housing, and age/gender. They then interview for jobs at the Law Firm, Health Clinic, Mall, and Construction Company. In Part II participants draw a salary from their new job and must budget their resources to see what kind of housing, transportation, groceries, and luxuries their salary can buy them. Then the staff help students debrief the process.

**What to do beforehand:** No requirements

**What happens at United Ministries:** Using a simulation kit designed by Our Eyes Were Opened (available for sale for \$49.95 at [www.oureyeswereopened.org](http://www.oureyeswereopened.org)), staff and volunteers facilitate the entire simulation.

**Time requirement:** One hour

**Cost:** Donation requested

### **Activity 13**

**Recommended ages:** Middle and high school

**Purpose:** To engage youth to provide the registration and book fees for a person to take the GED test (\$100 per Adult Student.)

**Brief description of activity:** Youth raise money to help someone who wants to further their education to be able to do so.

**What to do beforehand:** Have a fundraiser with the youth to raise enough money to help someone earn the GED. Set a goal for the number of GED students they want to help. The amount is \$100 a person. NOTE: Several hundred people earn their GED through United Ministries Adult Education program each year.)

**What happens at United Ministries:** Youth bring their donation to the Learning Center of United Ministries. They hear a brief presentation about the Adult Education program and tour the Learning Center.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

### **Activity 14**

**Recommended ages:** Middle and high school

**Purpose:** To help youth empathize with some of their classmates who may live in poverty.

**Brief description of activity:** Through a facilitated discussion, youth will begin to understand that some of their classmates may not have some of the advantages they enjoy.

**What to do beforehand:** No requirements

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff member facilitates the following discussion: Ask kids the following questions. List their answers.

- a. What is your favorite music group? How many of their cds or songs do you own?
- b. What are your favorite places to eat? How many times a month do you go there?
- c. How many pairs of athletic shoes do you own?
- d. What sports do you play? Are you on organized teams? Do your teams travel? Where do you go?
- e. How is your home heated? Gas Furnace? Electric furnace? Heat pump?
- f. How many coats do you own?
- g. Do you receive allowance? How often? Are chores required to receive your allowance?
- h. How many times this last year did your home have no electricity?
- i. Do you expect to attend college? Why?
- j. Name three of your favorite stores for buying clothes.

Talk about why some of their classmates may have trouble answering these questions. Here are guides to help:

- a. People who are poor may not have the funds to purchase music from their favorite group. Sometimes, however, because entertainment is highly valued in lower income groups, they may have a good collection. On the other hand, when people move a lot, which happens when a family cannot pay their rent, or when the primary breadwinner leaves the home, or when someone is ill or just lost a job, whatever items one may have collected may have to be left behind. There may be no time to pack and move. Everything is left and the family starts again in the next home.
- b. Could a person who is poor afford to eat in the places the students listed? How would they get there if they have no car? If a person has only about \$1 a meal, where can he/she eat out? If a meal costs more than \$1, then what does the person do for the other meals?
- c. Some people are lucky to own only one pair of shoes. Sometimes that one pair may be very nice because a bottom line value for people who have lived in poverty a long time is relationship. The belief is that when I give you something nice, I show how much I love you. Therefore, a mom may buy her child a great pair of shoes to show him/her how much she loves him/her instead of thinking about paying the water bill. Shoes may also be a sign of respect.
- d. Being on an organized sports team is expensive. Uniforms cost money. There may be no way to get to games unless transportation is provided by the team. Going to out of town tournaments costs money for lodging, food, and travel. Some families do not have extra money for these opportunities.
- e. When building codes do not require that a home have a heat source, then the home will be cold. If there is no furnace, the family often heats the home with a wood burning fireplace or kerosene heaters. Have any of your classmates ever smelled of wood or kerosene? Good, at least they were warm last night. They did not have to worry about freezing to death.
- f. Many students are lucky if they have *one* coat which fits them.
- g. Allowance. What's that? When a parent is working two or three jobs just to pay the rent and feed the family, there is no extra money for the children to have an allowance or money of their own. Some of your students' classmates may be doing all the cooking and caring for their younger brothers and sisters just because they have to and to help out their mom. They don't get "paid" to do that and they certainly don't receive an allowance.
- h. About the only time many of us lose electricity is when the weather is bad as with ice or wind storms. We complain and experience a major inconvenience. We rarely lose our power simply because our parents did not have enough money to pay the light bill AND the rent, buy food, and purchase medicine. We all live in homes which have good insulation and windows that are energy efficient. Some poor families have to pay as much to heat their small, drafty homes as your parents pay for your larger home. If you had to live without electricity for two weeks, could you do it? How would you handle that?
- i. College is usually not even discussed in families which are poor. No one in the family has ever attended college. It is too expensive.
- j. When naming shopping areas, did anyone name a thrift store? Goodwill? Garage sales? Can people without a car get to the stores you enjoy?

After the discussion, youth will tour the United Ministries facilities.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** Donation requested

## **Activity 15**

**Recommended ages:** Middle and high school

**Purpose:** To help youth empathize with some of their classmates who may live in poverty.

**Brief description of activity:** Through a facilitated discussion, youth will begin to understand that their classmates may be more like them than they thought.

**What to do beforehand:** No requirements

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff member facilitates the following discussion: Ask students to think about a classmate whom they assume is poor. Allow a minute for students to think of someone. Some may begin to make derogatory comments. If that happens, say, "Okay, let's work with that. Let's list all the ways the two of you are different." Remind students that they may not use labels such as "geek" and must use only words which are okay if the other person heard them.

List all the descriptions on a flipchart.

Then instruct: "Now let's list all the ways you are alike."

NOTE: You may have to help with questions such as:

Do you both like being out in the sun?

Do you both use lip gloss?

Do you both have two hands? Etc.

Keep working with the group until the alike list is longer than the unlike list. Point out that people are more alike than not alike. Discuss.

The youth will tour the facilities of United Ministries.

**Time requirement:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** Donation requested

## **Activity 16**

**Recommended ages:** Middle and high school

**Purpose:** To allow students to provide encouragement and help students who are working on their GED in the Adult Education program by providing basic school supplies.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth collect notebook paper, pencils, backpacks, etc. and bring them to the United Ministries Learning Center for adults who are working on their GED.

**What to do beforehand:** Collect school items that can benefit adults who are working on their GED.

**What happens at United Ministries:** Youth bring their collected school supplies to the Learning Center of United Ministries. They hear a brief presentation about the Adult Education program and tour the Learning Center.

**Time requirement at United Ministries:** 30-60 minutes

**Cost:** None

## **Activity 17**

**Recommended ages:** Middle and high school

**Purpose:** This experience will address some of the stereotypes of poverty by considering the poverty guideline definitions.

**Brief description of activity:** Youth will participate in a facilitated exercise and discussion about how the poverty guideline is defined.

**What to do beforehand:** No requirements

**What happens at United Ministries:** A staff member facilitates the following exercise:

Explain: "People are NOT defined as poor by the things which you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. Poverty is defined by the federal government by using a formula which was developed in the 1960s."

"To be defined as poor by the government means that your household has less money than is shown in the federal poverty guideline tables."

"These numbers might not mean a lot to you. Let's see if we can get some perspective."

NOTE: In 2009-10 the federal poverty guideline for a family of four was \$22,050. List some vehicles which kids would like and tell how much those cars cost. Compare with the poverty guidelines. Discover other "connections" with the teens to help them realize how little money is allowed to be considered "poor."

Now, let's discuss how these poverty guidelines were established.

Explain: "The formula for determining the poverty guidelines was set in the 1960s. How many of you were alive then? How many of your parents were alive then? So the formula is OLD!!!"

"The formula is based on the cost of food. The government identifies the basic minimum for how much it costs to feed a family of four for one year and then multiplies that number by three. Do any of you know how much your family spends at the grocery store during a regular shopping trip? Do you know how many times a month your mom, dad, or grandparent shops?"

"The problem with the formula is that it assumes that a family spends one-third of its budget on food. A family today actually spends about one-fifth of its budget on food. Other costs in the family are higher...childcare and transportation, for example."

As a group, work through the following formula:

I. Poverty guideline based on the cost of food

- a. Average cost of a meal at McDonalds = \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Multiply a. times 3 (each person receives three meals a day.)= \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. Multiply b.times 365 (total cost of meals for one person in your family per year) = \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. Number of people in your family = \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. Multiply c. times d. (total cost of meals for your family for a year) = \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. Multiply e. times 3 (poverty formula) = \_\_\_\_\_ .

"What if we determined that the poverty line was based on childcare? Suppose the cost for one preschooler and one child in elementary school was \$1,060 a month. Let's multiply that by twelve for the year's cost and then multiply by three for the poverty guideline. What happens?"

So what does all this mean? Does this change your image of people who are poor?

Ask: "If you don't have much money then..."

How does that affect how you look?

How does that affect what choices you have?

How does that affect where you can live?

How does that affect the kinds of foods you eat?

How does that affect what kinds of cars you can drive?"

Does having less money than the poverty guidelines (which categorizes a person as poor) define what kind of person you are? Why? Why not? How?

Then the youth will tour the facilities of United Ministries.

**Time requirement:** One hour

**Cost:** Donation requested

**NOTE:** After doing some of these projects, invite a local reporter to talk with the kids about what they have learned. Focus on some special human interest angle that will appeal to the reporter's audience. Better yet, if you know a reporter personally, invite him or her to "go along" with the group as they participate in these learning activities in order to report on the journey. The youth will enjoy being "celebrities" as they share their newly acquired insights.

**For More Information or to Schedule a United Ministries Youth Activity, contact:**

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For more information about all the offerings of the Our Eyes Were Opened program of United Ministries, please visit our website, [www.oureyeswereopened.org](http://www.oureyeswereopened.org) and look at the catalog.