**CROSS Missions: Continuing the Journey**

**What comes after CROSS?**

A week or weekend at CROSS Missions is a life changing experience. Adults and youth alike will notice a deepening of their faith in Christ, a new awareness of their neighbors, a longing to serve, and a strengthening of their friendships within the group that experienced this time together. How do you keep up this momentum after such a great week?

This packet will provide ideas, lessons and information for youth leaders to continue the journey of CROSS back home in their own towns and cities. It will provide a guide for crossing out lines that divide, ending stereotypes and sharing Christ’s love all year long.

**PLEASE NOTE: many of the lesson plans and ideas to support ministry sites listed below are based with local Charlotte ministry partners. Please utilize this resource and plug in your own local ministry sites throughout the year curriculum as you lead and facilitate conversations with your youth group. This is a flexible document and resource – feel free to use it, edit it, and make it work for your community.**

**One Week after CROSS**

Returning to your usual routine is an important part of the mission experience. When you live in an intentional community devoted to sharing Christ’s love, it provides you space to practice the faith you claim and the values you preach. The thing is, you can’t stay at the Outreach Center (or serving in Charlotte) for the rest of your life. You all must return home to the lives that God has built for you and called you to live into. This first week home will provide space for your group to rest after a typical CROSS week of holy exhaustion**. Encourage your group to use to this time to process and sit with the experiences they shared at CROSS. One way to do this is to write each member of your group a letter.** You could do this on your own or give each adult leader a few youth to write. It could also be done from the youth’s perspective. On Thursday night (the closing night of worship), you could ask the youth to draw a Guardian Angel name and let them know that their assignment is to write that person a letter, a text of encouragement or an email before the end of their first week back home.

These letters could include individual affirmations for each member of the group stating how you witnessed them grow in faith during this week. They could include a scripture verse from the week that had an impact on your group or claim a point you would like your youth to hold on to for the rest of the year. However you decide to make space for this touch point, please **remember that youth, like everyone, thrive with encouragement and affirmation**.

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**One Month after CROSS**

During this month, invite your youth and leaders to post their CROSS photos to a site (social media page or #, flickr page, etc.) that you have created for the group to share. At the end of the month, invite your group to come to the church or another location for a dinner and a slideshow of your CROSS adventures. After dinner and the slide show, consider inviting your group to break out into their CROSS small groups with the leaders of those groups. Let them spend a half hour together processing the experiences they had during that week and how they have impacted their lives now that they have returned.

Consider using these questions for discussion to prompt the debriefing time together:

* Now that a month has past, what was your favorite memory from our time at CROSS and why?
* How have you noticed that you have grown and changed since your time at CROSS?
* How do you think our group has grown and changed since our time at CROSS?
* How do you think God is shaping you to love and serve in our city? What gifts do you have to give people in need here?
* How have you experienced Christ’s love since you have returned from CROSS?

Remember to close your time in prayer and consider closing as you did during your mission week or weekend at CROSS Missions.

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**The Last Week of the Summer**

Before your youth return to their routine of school, homework and distractions, consider inviting them for a service outing in your own town or city. It would be helpful if you could create or find a list of service sites and non-profits where you could take your youth to serve on a regular basis. Consider choosing one where your whole group could serve together for a few hours or break the group into their CROSS small groups and send them to a couple organizations for a few hours of service together. **Here is an example lesson plan for this outing:**

**Open in Prayer**

*Gather your entire group together to pray together before you set off to serve.*

**Scripture**

*Invite your group to listen as you read this scripture. Remind them that the Holy Spirit guides their hearts and minds to help them translate what the Word of God means in their daily lives. Ask them to hold on to words or phrases that stand out to them and ponder them because they sparkled for a reason.*

**Matthew 4: 18-20**

**18-20**Walking along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon (later called Peter) and Andrew. They were fishing, throwing their nets into the lake. It was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” They didn’t ask questions, but simply dropped their nets and followed.

**Discussion**

*After you have read the scripture verses slowly and clearly, invite the youth to participate in a discussion of the scripture that was read by asking these questions.*

* What stood out to you in this passage? How do you think this passage applies to our opportunity to serve today?
* What did Jesus do in this passage?
	+ He invited the fishermen to follow him.
* What did Jesus promise that he would teach the fishermen?
	+ He would teach them how to fish for people.
* What did the fishermen already do for a living?
	+ They fished.
* Did Jesus ask them to do something totally foreign to what they were already gifted and experienced in doing?
	+ No, he called them to do exactly what they were trained to do, called them to do something they already enjoyed- he called them to fish just as they were equipped to do. He said he would teach them what it meant to use those gifts to fish for people.
* How does this passage relate to your life or what we will do today?
	+ It reminds us that God has given us the gifts, talents, passions and experiences that we have and God knows the desires of our hearts. In knowing us and gifting us, God knows exactly how we can use those gifts to help others and share Christ’s love with the world. God might call us to uncomfortable and new places or people, but God is probably providing us space to be exactly who he made us to be in those spaces.

**Set off to serve together**

*Leader, please share this information in your own words with the group.*

Today, we are going to experience serving in our own town. Remember that we should expect the unexpected, let’s remember not to box God in. We don’t know what God has planned for today even though we have attempted to make a plan for today. Please be open to the experience that God will provide. Additionally, I want to encourage you to note emotions or experiences from today that catch your attention. This is happening for a reason in your life as the Holy Spirit guides you to follow Jesus. Hold on to those moments and we will talk about them later today.

*Depart to your service sites.*

**Debrief your Experience**

*When the groups have returned from their service sites ask them to gather together to debrief their experience by asking the group these questions and giving them time to answer them out loud.*

* How did you experience the love of Christ today at your service site or within your group?
* How did you notice God might be leading you to serve in this city or within the experience you had today?
* What gifts do you have that you could use to love others in our city the way Jesus does?
* How can our church support you as you discern where the Holy Spirit is leading you to serve in our city?

**Close in Prayer**

*Invite your group to form a circle and pray together. Please encourage every person to simply talk to God and if all they can say to the Lord is “Thank you” then that is enough.*

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**During the Youth Group year**

The youth have now returned to school, the daily grind has begun. Your group has grown so much over the summer that you would really like to apply their gifts, passions and revelations to their daily, weekly, monthly experience of living in Christ. One way to do this is by providing **monthly service experiences for your group**. **Using or creating a list of service opportunities in your town/city is a great place to begin. Considering arranging a regular service opportunity monthly that could be done during your normal youth group time.** Or perhaps, you might schedule a “Service Saturday” where your group can gather for a longer experience of serving and even a meal and debrief together (remember how transformational breaking bread together can be). Perhaps, you provide a service site list for your town or city to the youth directly so that they can make decisions to serve their neighbors on their own time using the gifts and talents that the Spirit is moving them to share. However you decide to move forward, remember that this is a good space to invite youth to serve with you who might not have journeyed with you at CROSS Missions.

***Below you have been provided three example Lessons for Service Sundays that you could use with your group that can be done during the youth group time at your church.*** If you are able to schedule service experiences at service sites, then please remember to provide a scripture verse for your youth to think about during their time of serving and end with a debriefing session. **Debriefing is a crucial part of a service project**. This is the step that allows youth and leaders to pause and reflect on the experience, how God’s love might have been present and how this time of service applies to your deeper sense of purpose in life. It is a good discipline to model and teach to the youth.

**Service Sunday: Lesson 1**

**Ministry partner**: Men’s Shelter of Charlotte

**Activity:** Making “Texas Hash” dinner for men at homeless shelter

**Welcome** *Leader, please welcome the youth into the space and introduce yourself.*

**Open In prayer** *Leader, please open the group in a prayer of your own or the prayer below.*

Lord, thank for you for this evening where we can gather together. We are full, we have everything we need and in your abundance we are able to think past ourselves and remember our neighbors tonight who might be going to bed hungry or those who are in search of a bed or a place of safety and comfort. Open our hearts so that we can see your face in a crowd of people, so that we can discern ways to share your love openly with strangers and friends. Give us hearts of gratitude as we serve and grow together.

**Invitation** *Leader, please share this information in our own words. Consider engaging the youth by asking the questions provided and giving the youth enough time to answer them.*

Tonight we are going to make a meal called “Texas Hash.” Some of you have made this before. This meal was designed to give people a lot of nutrition all at once. It has all four food groups represented, it is packed full of carbs and protein, and it fills you up. It is also really easy to chew so if you have dental issues you can still enjoy this meal.

* Why do you think this is important? Who would want to eat something like Texas Hash?

We are making this meal for our neighbors at the Men’s Shelter of Charlotte. Raise your hand if you have been there before or have heard of it.

* Would someone like to tell us what Men’s Shelter of Charlotte provides for people in our city?

Men’s Shelter of Charlotte works hard to provide a safe place for men to sleep for the night. They take care of men in our city who are homeless by providing for their basic needs. They receive three nutritious meals a day, showers and clothing. They also have supportive services that help men with disabilities (SOAR), they also provide supportive services that help men receive dental care, respite care, learn life skills and receive life coaching, substance abuse treatments, mental health support, and they also provide connections to agencies that will help men find more permanent housing.

The hard thing about Men’s Shelter of Charlotte is that it is a first come, first serve basis. Men have to wait in line to find out if they can make it in. Once the shelter is full then men have to go somewhere else but their options are very limited. Men have to get in line every day, even ones who have already spent the night at Men’s Shelter to readmit each day. No one can just leave their things there and treat it like a hotel. They have to check in and check out each time. Men also do not qualify to stay in the Men’s Shelter of Charlotte until they can prove that they have been homeless for 90 days. Sometimes that is a very hard thing to do.

Many of you went to CROSS Missions this summer and had a chance to serve at Men’s Shelter of Charlotte or places like it. One of the most important ways that you can be Christ’s love in our city is simply by giving people the dignity of being seen, being acknowledged. Tonight we are going to make enough food to feed many men one good meal that will sustain their bodies for the day. This is a wonderful gift and they need this everyday just like we do. But one thing we can do every single day is speak to people, smile at them and give them the honor and dignity of being acknowledged as a human being.

Tonight, we are going to break into small groups that will prepare certain parts of our meal. Please raise your hand if you would like to be part of a certain group:

* Onion, pepper and Veggies Choppers
* Meat and Rice cookers
* Baggers and Labelers

Adults, will you each choose a group to be part of. As we cook this food and prepare these vegetables and meats, please be intentional about what you are doing. There are Monks in the world who believe that everything you do is an act of worship. As you chop those onions why don’t you pray for the men who will be eating them. As you cook the meat, why don’t you imagine homelessness ending in our city and people opening their arms to those in need. Let’s use this time respectfully and intentionally allowing all of our movements to be gestures of prayer and literally cook God’s love and healing right into this food to be shared with our neighbors.

**Cook the Meal**

*You have room to maneuver all around the kitchen.*

**Clean Up**

*Assign the youth from the small groups different clean up duties.*

*Washing, wiping, drying, trash, sweeping.*

**Closing**

*Please share with the youth how much food they were able to make and celebrate them.*

**Close in Prayer**

*Please invite the youth to form a “circle hug prayer” and open them. Ask the person to your left to close and invite each person to just speak to God. Remind them that the Holy spirit is living inside them and that when they talk to God he is so much closer than they can even imagine. Just talk to him the way you would a friend and if you cannot think of anything to say just say “Thank you.” God loves to be praised and there is much we should be grateful for.*

*\*Texas Hash can be stored in the hallway fridge outside of the kitchen (between the kitchen and the fellowship hall where the elevator is). This is the fridge that keeps all the food to be sent to non-profits.*

**Service Sunday Lesson-2**

**Ministry Partners:** Teach For America

**Activity:** Making goodie bags for training program that supports teachers who teach in low-income communities\neighborhoods

**Welcome**

*Leader, please welcome the youth and introduce yourself. If you are unfamiliar with the youth please consider inviting them to play a name game or share their names and something interesting about themselves like “where have you been on a mission trip or served a community?”*

**Open in Prayer**

*Leader, please lead the group in an opening prayer or invite the youth to pray.*

**Engage**

*Leader, please share this information in your own words so the youth understand why we are completing this service project.*

This Sunday we are going to make Halloween Goodie Bags for Teach for America Teachers. Do any of you know a Teach for America Teacher? Teach for America is a program that trains teachers to teach in low income areas where kids are most at risk. What do you think this is important? What do we know about education and poverty?

One of the most effective and best solutions to the problem of poverty is education. If people can receive a good education their chances of success and sometimes even survival sky rocket.

“Teach for America’s mission is to recruit a diverse group of leaders with a record of achievement who work to expand educational opportunity, starting by teaching for two years in a low-income community.  They provide intensive training, support and career development that helps these leaders increase their impact and deepen their understanding of what it takes to eliminate educational inequity. A growing movement of leaders, nearly 32,000 strong, works at every level of education, policy and other professions, to ensure that all children can receive an excellent education.“

Teachers in NC often do not get paid well. Many of them use their own resources to provide for their classrooms because they are not given budgets for their classes. Often times, TFA teachers have to use their own money to give their students treats or to have books in the classroom or even artwork. They are giving our city an enormous gift with their time and love.

“Charlotte’s education system has a rich history, from being at the forefront of the desegregation movement in the 1970s to winning the prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2011. Despite this, there is still a very real disparity in educational opportunities between low-income students and their more affluent peers. Within a few miles of the prospering business districts of downtown, there are schools where only one-third of students are on grade level in reading and math. Teach For America is working with school, community, political, and business leaders across Charlotte to change this.

Today, our teachers reach nearly 15,000 students in 40 schools across Charlotte. Nearly 300 Teach For America alumni call the city home, including 10 alumni serving as principals and assistant principals in high-poverty schools. Together with thousands of families, educators, and community partners, we are working to ensure that the more than 70,000 economically disadvantaged students in Charlotte receive educational opportunities that will put them on the path to success.”

Our church supports one of the many at-risk schools in CMS, Highland Academy. Many of you have served there before. Our church leads a program where our members bring books to the classrooms o f 3-5th grade youth so that they can continue to read on grade level and above. Our volunteers read with the students and give them a chance to order books they are interested in and then receive those books. Books are given to each kid in the class once every two months and new books are donated to the teachers classroom.

In addition to this, there are two TFA teachers at Highland. Does anyone know what day is coming up that folks like to celebrate? Halloween! This is a fun day in elementary school isn’t it? Does anyone remember how their teachers would celebrate this with the class? This is a great way for teachers and students to bond and enjoy time together. We want our TFA teachers to be able to experience this little joy in teaching, just playing with their students. Since they do not have the resources to buy treats for their kids we are going to make them goodie bags so they can hand them out to their students.

**Service Project**

*Leader please put the youth into small groups to complete the various tasks. It would be helpful to have a youth or two, stand up all the goodie bags. Then have a several youth in charge of filling the bags with candy, etc, until all the bags are filled. One station will be a “note station” where the youth should write notes to the children to be added to the bags. These notes should tell the youth they are special and loved or encourage them to keep trying to do well in school.*

*When all the bags are filled with candy and at least one note please fold down the tops and add them to the box to be left outside of my office.*

**Close in Prayer**

*Leader, please invite the youth to circle into a hug prayer and go around the circle talking to God.*

**Service Sunday Lesson-3**

**Ministry partner:** Changed Choices

**Activity:** Making Thanksgiving Cards for non-profit supporting women who have been previously incarcerated

**Open in Prayer**

Leader, please invite the youth to pray with you as you lead them in prayer.

**Scripture**

*Leader, please open by reading this scripture or inviting the youth to read this scripture out loud. Then follow it with the questions provided.*

**Matthew 25:35-40**

34-36“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.’

37-40“Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

**Discussion**

* Will someone translate this scripture into your own words and tell us what you think it means?
* Jesus said this to his disciples. What is Jesus asking us to do?
* What does Jesus say about people in prison?
* In another passage Jesus asks us to “Love our neighbors as we love ourselves.” This is known as the “Greatest Commandment”. If we believe this to be true, how could we love our neighbors who are in prison as we love ourselves?

**Project**

*Leader, please share this in your own words.*

Tonight we are going to remember our neighbors in prison. Since Thanksgiving is coming up this week, we are going to write Thanksgiving cards to our neighbors in prison. We will not know who is going to receive each card so please write them generally but please be sure and offer a message that is thoughtful. Imagine that you are in prison. What would you like to read if you received card? What might bring you comfort when you are far from your family on Thanksgiving? These are the messages that we want to send. Feel free to sign your first name only and if you want to you can simply sign “Love, Your Churches Name Youth Group”.

These cards are going to be delivered through an organization called “Changed Choices”. Many of you have helped do yard work for the women at Changed Choices. This organization provides housing for women who have just been released from prison so that they can begin to transition back into society and do well. Changed Choices has a ministry of writing cards to women who are not yet out of prison. Many of these women have children they are missing so the holidays are especially hard on them. Please pray for the person who might receive your card and be very thoughtful about the message that you send them.

For more information about Changed Choices please look here: <http://www.changedchoices.org/>

**Close in Prayer**

*Leader, please close the youth in prayer or ask a youth to close in prayer.*

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**6 Months after CROSS**

During this week, all individuals who participated in CROSS will receive letters from CROSS Missions to their homes. These are the letters that youth and leaders wrote to themselves during their last night at CROSS. Each year, these letters seem to come at just the right time in the youth’s lives. It is just long enough after the experience of CROSS for it to feel like it was so long ago, but still close enough for the youth to fall quickly back into the memories of the CROSS week. Reading these letters is an inspirational reminder of a life change in each of them that might be something they have started to ignore. This is a great way to help them remember what Christ is doing in their lives.

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**April or May before you set off for CROSS again**

*You have served together all year long, debriefed and applied the lessons the Holy Spirit has been teaching you to your daily walk. Now it is time to prepare for another mission week/weekend at CROSS Missions. Here are some ideas that you would apply to you group.*

* **Returning Youth as Leaders-**Consider asking youth who attended CROSS last year to be devotion or debrief leaders for your group during your devotional time this summer.
* **Returning Youth leading Guardian Angels-**Consider inviting a youth to oversee Guardian Angels, explain it to the group, make the name papers, and lead the Guardian Angel time during devotions.
* **Youth plans the Free Night Challenge-**Consider inviting your youth to plan your free night. Invite them to research fun things that you group could do for free in the city of Charlotte (Wednesday evening). Many of the people you serve in the city of Charlotte do not have the means to go to movies, spend time at the mall and shop, or even get ice-cream. How can someone with no money still have fun in the city? Challenge your youth to come up with a fun plan for your night off that any homeless youth in our city could enjoy. During that evening time together, ask those youth to debrief the fun (free) experience with the group and lead them in the evening devotional time in that space.
* **Youth Photographers-** Consider inviting a few youth who enjoy photography to document your experience at Cross through their photos. Then invite them to create a photo sharing site online that the group can contribute to and also download photos they like from their mission week.
* **Gift Affirming-** Consider inviting/training your CROSS adult leader to keep their eyes open for gifts and passions emerging in your youth. Have them share those observations with you and invite them to help you find ways to connect those youth to spaces where they can serve and use those gifts to benefit your city or youth group when you return home.
* **CROSS Dinner-** Consider inviting your returning youth and youth who would like to attend CROSS for the first time to a youth group dinner. Show your photos from your CROSS experience from last summer and invite youth to share some of the highlights from their experience. Invite them to share both fun times being with the group and ways that they experienced Christ’s love over the summer. It is important to also give the youth space to talk about how they have changed for the better since they spend time at CROSS. This will excite the returning youth and leaders while inspiring the youth who have not yet experienced CROSS. This dinner could be a great thing for your congregation to attend as well.

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**Return to CROSS Missions 2019**

*Written by Claire Tomkinson - mSpiritual Director, Artist, Retreat Facilitator and Founder of Waked Up Studio*

*WakedupStudio is a sacred space where spiritual life practices are shared in order to encourage holistic transformational living in individuals and groups. Waked Up Studio seeks to share a variety of holistic, intentional practices that nurtures spiritual fulfillment and supports the pouring out of creativity and joy in one's the daily experience of living by offering one-on-one Spiritual Direction, Weekend Retreats, Workshops, Classes, Online Classes, Weekly Blog Posts, and Meditational Artwork.*

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