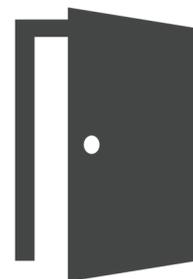


OPENING DOORS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

**by Kathy Chapman Sharp
and J. Ryan West**



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Introduction

God's mission was given to every member of His church. No matter our occupation, we're all called to be everyday missionaries. It doesn't matter if we're business professionals, school teachers, stay-at-home moms, contractors or attorneys—as believers, we're all called to practice life on mission.

People who live on mission are always on the move towards others. They don't wait for the world to come to them; they seek and find people who have needs.

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us ...”

This Scripture found in Acts 17:26-27 (ESV), teaches us that God has placed each of us in distinctive places at exact times so that those around us may come to know Him. That's what being an everyday missionary is all about—joining God where He is at work right where He has placed us!

Life On Mission is a way of life. Here are 31 suggestions—one for each day of the month—to get you and your church started. You can do them all, or just choose several where your members can come together and make an impact on your surrounding area. Some churches could host many of these activities on a single weekend. Others may only be able to host one a month. Regardless, try something to activate your members and serve your neighbors.

Your church members will connect with people they would not ordinarily have the opportunity to meet. Entire families can engage together - no matter age or stage of life. Together, they'll meet legitimate needs. Don't be discouraged if someone says no to an invitation. Even a no can lead to a conversation to build a relationship.

Most importantly, these opportunities to minister in your community will help your church members to better understand and envision what it might mean to engage on a regular basis as everyday missionaries.

For many of these activities you will want to produce buzz cards highlighting the event specifics for your members to help promote the activity.

1. Front Yard Barbecue

Encourage your church members to move their grills from the back yard out to the front yard and invite their neighbors for a front yard barbecue! Provide hamburgers, hot dogs, along with chips and chilled sodas. It doesn't have to be fancy, but it's a great opportunity to get to know your neighbors better. Consider inviting neighbors to begin a small group, and don't forget to provide buzz cards to your church members to hand out as invitations to attend your church services.

2. Celebrate Teachers

Plan a teacher appreciation/celebration luncheon for your community following your church service one Sunday afternoon, and invite all the teachers from your local elementary, middle and high schools. If you have teachers in your church, ask them to help you plan the event.

Serve a delicious meal and provide light entertainment. After the meal, have your pastor say just a few words on behalf of your church thanking them for all their hard work and letting them know just how loved and appreciated they are.

Most teachers spend their own money buying extra art and other supplies for children to use. Collect new packages of crayons, pens, markers, etc., ahead of the event. Set up a table with all the collected items, provide bags, and allow teachers to go "shopping" for supplies as they leave the event.

Finally, hand them a personal gift or baked goodies basket as they exit the building—just one more reminder of how much they are loved and appreciated.

3. Public Servants' Appreciation Day

Say thank you to public servants like police officers and firemen who put their lives on the line every day for your community by holding a day of appreciation for them. Anything from a simple plate of home-baked cookies to gift cards they can use at local restaurants will be appreciated. Don't forget to include hand-written notes from your church members thanking them for their service to the community. Finally, be sure to call ahead and set up a convenient time for your delivery.

4. Single Moms' Brunch

Choose a Saturday to serve single moms in your church and community. If your church has women's and men's ministries, ask them to host and serve.

Invite single moms and their children for a fun-filled Saturday morning. Have special activities for the children, including pizza, while single moms are pampered with a beautiful brunch followed by manicures and pedicures. Set up a car servicing area in the church parking lot where church members can check the tires, fluid levels, and even change oil. Finish up the servicing by washing cars on the outside and cleaning the inside. You might even consider filling up the gas tank!

Finally, prepare a goody bag that's filled with cosmetics and other personal treats that single moms are not usually able to splurge on. Be sure and include a buzz card about your church with information on your preschool, children's and student ministries. And don't forget a personal invitation to attend your church on Sunday as you say good bye.

5. Love In Action

Look for elderly couples and widows/widowers in your community that you can serve by helping around the house. Choose a day for church members to gather and divide into house teams. Offer to do anything needed like touching up paint, cleaning out gutters, mowing the lawn and trimming bushes. You might even bring a beautiful bouquet of flowers to the widows. When each house team is finished, take your special person/couple out for a nice meal at a local restaurant.

6. Parents' Night Out

Host a free parent's night out for families in your community one evening. Provide G-rated family movies with popcorn and pizza for the kids and send parents off to have a quiet date without the little ones. When they return to pick up their kids, send them home with a goody bag that includes service times and other information about your church.

7. New Parents Ministry

Have your church put together "Newborn Kits" to share with new parents at your local hospital. Fill each basket with fun and essential items like newborn diapers and wipes, lotion, baby wash, blankets and more. Don't forget to include restaurant gift cards to help with those busy days when mom and baby first come home. Also ask young moms in your church to contribute an index card with their best piece of advice for new parents and include one in each kit. Add a brochure about your church infant and preschool ministries, and include worship times and an invitation to attend.

8. Support Military Families

If you live in a military community, you have a great opportunity to minister to the families of deployed servicemen and servicewomen. Once you've located families, call and schedule a work day with them. Wash off siding, cut the lawn, and trim the bushes. Ask if there are other things that need to be done. When you've finished, get the address of the spouse serving, and invite their family to join you in putting together a special care package filled with some of their favorite things. Choose a date, and meet at the church to put the package together. Remember how much they're missing their family, so include photos of their spouse and children taken at the workday.

9. Super Serve Saturday

Plan a Super Serve Day for church members to give back to the community:

- Offer to clean store front windows and sweep parking lots at your local Starbucks and/or fast-food restaurants.
- Call, and offer to do maintenance and gardening projects at your local nursing home. Provide all your own tools and supplies.
- Volunteer to pick up trash and clean the restrooms in your local park
- Meet with school administrators to set up teams to paint and clean at your local public schools. Provide paint and cleaning supplies.
- Meet with city officials, and see how your church volunteers can serve by cleaning up parks, painting a mural over graffiti, etc.
- Find local grocery stores that will allow your church members to volunteer to help patrons carry their bags of groceries to their car. Offer to load the bags into their trunks or back seats, and don't forget to offer a kind and encouraging smile. Accept no tips!

10. Walk the Walk!

Plan a Saturday prayerwalk for your entire church family. Prayerwalking is a creative way for your church members to intercede for their neighbors, communities, schools and even your whole town. Ask church members to walk areas where they live and shop, being mindful of opportunities to stop and chat and building relationships with neighbors and shop owners for whom they are praying.

Typically, prayerwalkers stroll through their neighborhoods praying both silently and aloud. As they intercede for their neighbors, they can also use the time for praise and worship. When the opportunity presents itself to speak with neighbors,

they should be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit — if appropriate, they may have the opportunity to find out if their neighbor has a special need or prayer request.

Find more ideas at namb.net/prayerwalking-tips.

11. Just Say Thanks!

Say a special “thank you” to the people who serve you everyday by inviting them to have a cup of coffee on your church. Purchase \$5 gift cards from your local coffee shop ahead of time, and distribute them to church or small group members. On a selected day, your church members should hand them out to their favorite helpers at the grocery store, bank, dry cleaners, restaurant waitstaff, or any other establishment where they receive great service with a smile. Be sure to tell them your church wants to say “thanks” for all they do by buying them a cup of coffee.

12. Free Car Wash

Setting up a free car wash in your church parking lot is a great way to serve your community. Invite youth and adults alike to participate. Set up several washing stations, so folks don’t have a long wait time.

You’ll need several signs announcing “FREE CAR WASH TODAY” and others saying, “No donations accepted, we’re just serving the community today.” People will try to give you money, but don’t accept it. Just tell them you only want to serve.

13. Cheer Up! Baskets

Provide Cheer Up! Baskets for your local hospital. Call ahead and speak to your local hospital to make sure you can provide these baskets. Gather church members to donate and put these baskets together, then deliver them to the appropriate person. Be sure to have people volunteer to periodically replenish this basket.

Cheer Up! Basket #1 (*Hospital Waiting Rooms*)

Include the following items for this large basket:

- Non-perishable snacks like granola bars and peanut butter crackers, etc.
- Small bottles of water
- Coloring books and small boxes of crayons
- Pens
- Note pads

- Tissues
- Mints

Don't forget to attach a sign to the basket that says: We hope this basket provides some comfort for you today. Please call on us if we can pray with you. <Add church name and number here>

Cheer Up! Basket #2 (*for newly admitted children*)

Provide these baskets for children who have been admitted to the hospital.

- Small stuffed teddy bears or animals
- Child-size blankets
- Activity books
- Coloring book and crayons

When you're delivering these baskets, why not take along platters of cookies or cupcakes for each nursing station. (Don't forget the ER. Include a note saying "Thank you for all you do.")

14. A Positive Picture

Provide a FREE photo opportunity for families in your community. Enlist professional photographers in your church to shoot the photos, then have them post the photos to Facebook where families can go to download them. Give them a buzz card with the Facebook page information, and include your church information as well. Set up several shoot locations at your church that are easy to find. Make sure you have folks there to welcome families and chairs set up in case they have to wait. Use professional backdrops; you can find 5' x 7' vinyl backdrops for as little as \$35.00 at amazon.com.

15. Friday Night at the Movies

Invite families in your community to bring their lawn chairs and blankets for a free Friday Night at the Movies on your church grounds. Set up a large outdoor screen and speaker system, and show family-oriented flicks and cartoons. Make sure you have plenty of folks on hand to welcome families and help them set up. Provide free popcorn and soft drinks. Be sure your church has proper permission or licensing rights to show the film.

16. The Great Closet Clean Out Day

Set a date for church members to clean out their closets for clothes and toys that can be given to local homeless shelters. Ask church members to provide items that are gently used, in very good condition and have been cleaned and laundered before delivery. Encourage them to remember that while clothes are needed for men and women, toys and clothing of all sizes are also needed for children.

Provide a collection drop-off space at your church, and have volunteers sort through, label and bag items for delivery as families drop them off. Contact your local homeless shelters to set up a time for delivery.

17. Community Kids' Day Event

Show your community how much your church values children by hosting a Kids' Day Event at your church. If weather permits, hold the event outside—decorating with helium balloons that create a special celebration atmosphere.

Create areas for the children to visit and engage in different 30-minute activities.

Art Crawl - Provide several art activities. Teach the kids how to mix paint colors and invite them to paint pictures that can be displayed on a clothesline until the children are ready to leave. Have a table where kids can make their own paper-sack puppets to use at the Sidewalk Circus area. Also, offer a blocked-off section of the church parking lot where the children can create colored chalk pictures.

Gym - Allow children to choose between basketball, soccer, kick-ball or four-square. Teach basic skills, then play short tournaments. Use church volunteers to teach, host and referee.

Game Land - Have church members bring their favorite board games like *Monopoly*, *Candy Land*, etc., and set them up on game tables outdoors. Hold tournaments and give out prizes. You can also create your own version of outdoor Twister.

Sidewalk Circus - Create an outdoor area with seating and a Puppet stage for puppets shows as well as short skits the kids can perform. Have the kids use puppets they made in the Art Crawl section.

Music Beat - Provide children with the opportunity of making instruments and learning a song. At the end of each session, have a parade around the parking lot with the children singing the song they learned and playing their instruments.

Snack Shack - Set up a snacking station with freshly-popped pop corn and snow cones.

Finally, don't forget parents. Create a special area for parents that serves iced tea and coffee as well as home-baked snacks. Include a display with information about your church with buzz cards they can pick up and take home.

18. Volunteer As a Church Family

Encourage your church families to show the love of Christ to those who are less fortunate. Your city probably has several hard-working ministries to homeless people or poverty-stricken communities who would welcome volunteers anytime since most people volunteer during the holidays. Choose a day to volunteer as a church family. Contact the ministries to see how your volunteer families can best be utilized.

Offer to:

- Provide a worship service
- Greet people
- Help cook meals
- Serve meals
- Provide conversation

Your families may even have the opportunity to hand out clothing and food staples to folks as they leave.

19. Newcomers' Celebration

Does your city welcome immigrants and refugees? Do you have an ethnic community close by your church? Plan and publicize a Newcomer's Celebration. Contact services like World Relief to help you plan and find out information about who is living in your area. Have church members donate new or gently used items for free shopping in the clothes closet, food pantry, furniture and wall decor store, and the linen closet.

You can offer these items and activities during your celebration:

- Q & A Session - Answer any questions they might have.
- Map of the City - Mark maps with hospitals, schools, your church, etc.
- Cooking Exchange - Church members cook an American meal, and your guests cook ethnic meals. Then, serve the food as a potluck with each cook sharing about his or her dish.

Provide Bags for free shopping at:

- Clothes Closet
- Food Pantry
- Furniture and Wall Decor Store
- Linen Closet

As families are leaving, provide gloves and scarves for each member. Many new families come to America from warm places and are not prepared for the chilly or cold weather that fall and winter will bring. They'll be thankful and remember your church when the cold weather arrives.

20. International Students' Picnic

Host an International Students' Picnic at a park near your church. Invite families from your church to attend—encouraging them to take advantage of the opportunity to establish long-term relationships with the students while they are in the country attending school.

Have families bring traditional picnic-basket lunches—keeping in mind that many student's religious beliefs may not allow them to eat certain types of meat. Pair up students and families to make sure no one is left out.

Most international students never have the opportunity to interact with American families, but they would enjoy doing so. Inviting them to be a part of family birthdays and holiday celebrations would be an honor for them.

Find out about international students in your community by contacting the international student office at your local college or university.

21. Blessing Bags

Gather as a church to make Blessing Bags that can be handed out by church members whenever they see a person in need.

You'll need these items:

- Sealable bags
- A non-perishable food items like peanuts or granola bars
- A new pair of socks
- Hotel-sized toiletries
- A toothbrush and small-sized toothpaste

Include a tract as well as an invitation to visit your church. Encourage your church members to keep these bags in their cars, so they can distribute them when they encounter need.

22. Hope for Families

Many churches have an outreach ministry to inmates at local jails or prisons, but have you considered their extended families? If your church has a prison ministry, start by asking individuals there about their families, and request permission to contact them to see if they might have needs your church can meet. Reaching out in genuine friendship can go a long way in overcoming the shame that often comes with having a family member incarcerated. It's also a great way to bring hope to families who sometimes feel they are living in a hopeless situation.

Consider a special luncheon or activity where invited families can interact with your church members and establish friendships. Ask your members to continue ministering to these families by having them over to experience Christian hospitality and life in their homes on a regular basis. Since many families experience economic hardships, they might also consider offering to babysit to give the parent a break to go shopping or run errands.

23. Man's Night Out for Single Fathers

Here's a great opportunity for the men in your church to minister to single fathers in your community. Not only will it provide an outlet to be around other men who are good influences, it will give them a much needed break on a Friday or Saturday night.

Gather the men of your church, and make a list of single fathers in their workplaces, neighborhoods and other social circles. Send an invitation to join your mens' group for a "Man's Night Out," that includes dinner, an activity like bowling and free childcare. To offer a more comfortable experience for the children, consider pairing a few of your couples together to babysit the children in designated homes instead of your church, since they may be there for several hours.

24. Back to School Backpacks

For children coming from economically needy homes, it can be difficult to afford the necessary school supplies or disappointing to be given worn-out and recycled materials. Why not consider helping these children get their school year off to a

good start, and give them a measure of dignity at the same time.

First, schedule a visit with your local school principal, and offer to help meet this need in their school; they will provide a number for backpacks needed as well as a list of items needed in each backpack. For a long-term ministry, you might even offer to “adopt” the school and help with other needs as well.

Collect new backpacks and the necessary school supplies over the course of several weeks from church members. Then, gather as a church family to fill each backpack with supplies. Provide stationary for those helping to write a special note telling each child your church is praying for them to have an excellent school year. Pray over the backpacks and don't forget to add them to your weekly prayer list!

Deliver your backpacks before school starts, so they can be distributed, and each child receiving a backpack can arrive in style on the first day of school.

25. Move-In Special

Choose a day to help families and university students move into their new homes. If you have real estate agents in your church, check with them to find out if they know of any families moving on that day. You can also check with local apartment communities, and speak with managers. Call your local college or university, and find out when students arrive to move into their dorms.

Invite your church members to volunteer their time and help by unloading boxes and carrying them inside. You can even help unpack boxes, if needed, and clean and dispose of packing materials. Don't forget to bring a cooler filled with iced down water—everyone will be glad you did!

26. Senior Citizen Worship

One of the loneliest people groups in North America is comprised of senior citizens living in nursing homes or senior living homes. Plan a special worship service for senior citizens, and invite your church members to participate. You might even call on small groups or Sunday School classes to help with the event.

Singing a few hymns, reading Scripture, and having a 10-minute devotional will bring so much joy to their lives.

Contact the activities director, and ask permission to host a worship service in their

facility for the residents. Find a time on the activities calendar that is not already booked with bingo, music, or another regular aspect of the community's calendar. Then, bless these men and women by bringing the hope of Christ and a warm smile into their lives. Chances are your church will want to continue hosting a monthly, quarterly or other special worship service for these senior citizens.

27. Student Sports Camp

Find men and women in your congregation who are athletically gifted, and offer a one-day sports camp for students in your church and community. This effort can be an all-day or half-day experience. If you choose to do an all-day camp, plan on feeding participants a healthy lunch. With either approach, you'll need to offer hydration and have medically-trained volunteers on-site. Focusing on one sport per camp greatly reduces the amount of administration, scheduling and overall coordination required to run this experience well, but if you have enough experienced volunteers, you could offer multi-tracks like basketball and soccer, etc. Also, check with your local high school for players and coaches willing to volunteer at the camp.

Make sure you have all the necessary supplies and equipment on hand, and, if possible, provide special t-shirts created for camp participants.

You might also ask local sports stores and businesses for donations. Not only will it help defray costs, it brings an element of community spirit to your event. Just be sure to recognize and thank those who donate in an appropriate manner.

28. Car Repair Service

Even simple car service can be a financial burden for many families in your community. Gather mechanically inclined members in your church, and provide minor car repairs on a Saturday in your church parking lot. You can offer simple services like oil changes as well as replacing fuses, headlights, taillights, and timing belts, etc.

Check with auto parts and local discount stores to see if they are willing to donate supplies for your event. Be sure to have very knowledgeable people in charge of this effort to ensure that you don't begin a project that cannot be completed during the day.

You might even offer to wash the cars—inside and out—as an extra bonus. Don't forget to plan for approved disposal of any broken parts or drained oil or transmission fluid collected during your event.

29. Health Screenings For All

Capitalizing on the vocational abilities of medical professionals in your congregation, bless your community by offering a free health-screenings event. Make sure to consider the level of healthcare you will offer, and clearly articulate it, so that you do not create unreasonable expectations.

Set up a receiving area with basic paperwork to determine the service that individuals will receive during this time. Have volunteers interact with individuals or families during their entire experience—walking them through the facility from station to station.

Depending on the expertise of medical personnel in your congregation, you can typically offer basic services such as blood pressure and cholesterol screenings. With the right personnel, you may be able to expand your services to include basic dental care and other medical services. Consult with your medical professionals to determine the services you can provide and what is needed concerning supplies, rooms for privacy and general traffic patterns within the facility where you'll be hosting the event.

30. Winning the Game

The summer and fall seasons provide an excellent opportunity to serve your local high school football team and minister to several hundred people in the process. Call your local high school principal and football coach to offer your church's volunteer services.

During the summer, volunteers from your church can provide iced sports drinks and water during practices.

During game season, your church can provide pre-game meals for the team. The school may supply the food and facilities to prepare pre-game meals, but if not, be ready to take on the expense yourself.

Schools typically have to rely on parent volunteers to run concession stands, take up tickets, and clean facilities following the game. Your church can help meet this

need, costing your church nothing and winning great favor with the local school administration.

31. Cultural Exchange

Host an event for refugees and immigrants in your community by inviting these newcomers to share about their customs with your church family. Ask them to bring items to display from their home country and to share aspects from their culture that are deeply meaningful to them.

Leaving one's homeland is an extremely difficult process, and an event like this is an excellent way to make friendships, build trust and deepen relationships with those who need Christ. You might even consider holding this event on a Sunday following the Newcomers Celebration (#19) on Saturday.

Coordinate with your guests concerning food and recipes, music, celebrations and other elements that will help your congregation experience their culture. Ultimately, taking a sincere interest the ethnic cultures found in your community will broaden your members' appreciation for neighbors in your community and cast a vision for engaging in global missions right around the corner.

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