



Day of Prayer and Action for Children Ten Tips for New Photographers in the Field

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” a popular proverb says. We might also say that a *good* picture is worth a thousand smiles, or a thousand seeds of hope and encouragement! After all, a good picture is more than a mere snapshot of a moment in time. A thoughtfully taken photo tells a significant story in a moment.

Photography can even be a spiritual practice for those who believe, because we are looking for particular images to lift up for a faith-based purpose. In our case, that purpose is to show actions at a Day of Prayer and Action for Children, to tell a story of what happened there through just five to ten photos at most. The following tips come from the wisdom of experienced photographers to encourage you in your role as a visual storyteller. Thank you for your partnership in this work!

1. Have a plan. Consider in advance what kinds of images you want to capture. Write them down into a notepad as a checklist for yourself. For example: leaders of varied faith traditions assembling for a procession into a worship service; speakers doing their presentation while audience members listen attentively; a group taking part in an awareness campaign or mapping exercise; children or youth participating in the World Day event. Be alert for opportunities at the event that you did not think of earlier, but do have a plan before you go there.

2. Get ready. Test your equipment, and practice if you need to. Be sure you have enough batteries. If they are the rechargeable kind, recharge them the day before the event. If you are using a digital camera, bring a memory card or two with enough capacity for taking medium or large images. Bring your notepad to write down names of speakers and notes for captions or to identify images.

3. Go to the location early if possible.

-- Introduce yourself to the event organizer/s as a photographer for the day. Ask for their suggestions on what photos would show the heart of the event. They may suggest opportunities you might not have thought about. Also, if a large group picture is deemed a good idea, the organizer/s can also choose a time and announce it so that people will gather for you to take the photo at a designated time and place.

-- Ask if there is a printed or posted schedule for the day. Make a note to yourself to remember where various groups will be meeting, and when. Consider where will you stand or move, in order to take your pictures. If your camera does not allow you to zoom in from a distance, you may need to move up closer to the activity. You do not want to distract the leaders or participants, but occasionally walking up, taking a picture and then moving away may be all right. Use your judgment.

-- Look at the space where the activities will happen. Will there be enough light available, or will you need to use your camera flash?

4. Aim for small group action! Large group photos are useful to document the event, to show who was there or how many in general attended. But these formally posed large group portraits do not bring the viewer closer in feeling to the people they do not know. Therefore, aim for photos of two to five persons, so that it is possible to see their faces and expressions. A good photo will bring out a feeling that makes a viewer feel connected to the event or the experience of the people there.

Think: "How can my picture help to show what is happening here? What actions did the people take together to help children?" Though people do not have to look directly at the camera, it is good to show people looking interested or involved. This usually means that their eyes are open, unless they are praying. It is also helpful to show people using their hands to take action. Semi-posed photos are fine, and when you are fortunate, candid or unposed pictures can work very well too.

Also, some cultures enjoy expressing pleasure outwardly. If so, why not take photos of them smiling and happily working together? On the other hand, if your group does not smile easily, then just show them in action. Honesty with integrity are important keys for any photographer.

5. Use a higher (rather than lower) recording pixel on your digital camera. Later when you transfer your photos onto a computer, the higher setting will allow you to enlarge and even "crop," or trim off parts you don't want from your picture, without losing clarity.

The images on a computer screen are composed of tiny dots called *pixels* (short for *picture element*). The computer controls each pixel individually. Most monitors have hundreds of thousands, or often millions, of pixels that are lit or dimmed to create an image...Pixels vary in size according to the size and resolution of the monitor. Smaller pixels provide higher resolution, and therefore sharper images, but require more memory to store the color and intensity data of each pixel and more processing time to refresh the screen. Resolution is frequently referred to in terms of *dpi*, or *dots per inch*.¹

6. Take more than one photo. This is your chance to depict the moment. But sometimes, people close their eyes just when the flash goes off. Try to ensure a usable picture by taking two or even three of the same pose.

7. Include variety in your set of five to ten pictures. Sometimes, closeups of just one person can be interesting and even compelling. So although taking small groups in action is your main goal, taking some individuals may work well too. You do not have to take full-length (full body) pictures unless that is needed for telling story. But in general, be sure to frame the photo well enough to show the person's whole head!

8. Show the diversity. Try to show among your pictures the diversity of people participating: seniors or elders; middle aged adults; young adults; children; women and men; people of different faith traditions.

9. Show some background. Coming close enough with your camera to see actions and

expressions of people is essential. But showing some background is also important, because it suggests where the actions took place: in what country, in what kind of neighborhood or area, in what setting. So step up – but not too close! About background distance: do not place people directly in front of a wall, or your flash may create shadows. Simply ask them to move closer to you, about three feet away from the wall.

10. Think visually. If participants are wearing name tags and appearing in a posed photo, ask them to remove the tag for the moment; the end result will look neater than seeing tags at various angles later. Think in general what will help capture the beauty of the day. In addition to the actions of the leaders and participants, are there visual aspects not to miss (e.g. colorful banners, worship leaders in ceremonial traditional garb, or an exhibit of children’s artwork)?

Your thoughtful service as a photographer will encourage the Day of Prayer and Action for Children community worldwide. Please email your pictures, along with captions or brief descriptions, to mail@dayofprayerandaction.org. Thank you so much!

ENDNOTE

1. pixel. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Science Dictionary*. Houghton Mifflin Company. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/pixel> (accessed: January 08, 2010).