



# enrichment

Enriching and equipping Spirit-filled ministers ■ Winter 2012

## COMPASSION MINISTRY: EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD



The Spirit  
of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor. ...

Luke 4:18











## COMPASSION MINISTRY: EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

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## COACHING FOR LIFE AND LEADERSHIP

**Coaching is about helping the people you lead** bridge the gap between where they are in life and ministry and where they want to be. It is also about helping yourself. Coaching helps break down walls that hinder your growth and development. Coaching helps you find your purpose, achieve your goals, discover balance, and get more out of life. It is a new way of looking forward and experiencing breakthroughs and transformation that will help you and those you lead find and accomplish God's vision for their life and ministry.

In this issue you will read informative and practical articles by many of today's top Christian coaching experts: Bill Cooper, Jane Creswell, Keith Edwards, Sam Farina, Chad Hall, Kathryn McElveen, Linda Miller, Steve Ogne, Tim Roehl, Greg Saliccioli, Dwight Sandoz, and others.



# enrichment

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Spirit-filled ministers

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ADVERTISING COORDINATOR**  
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**DESIGN**  
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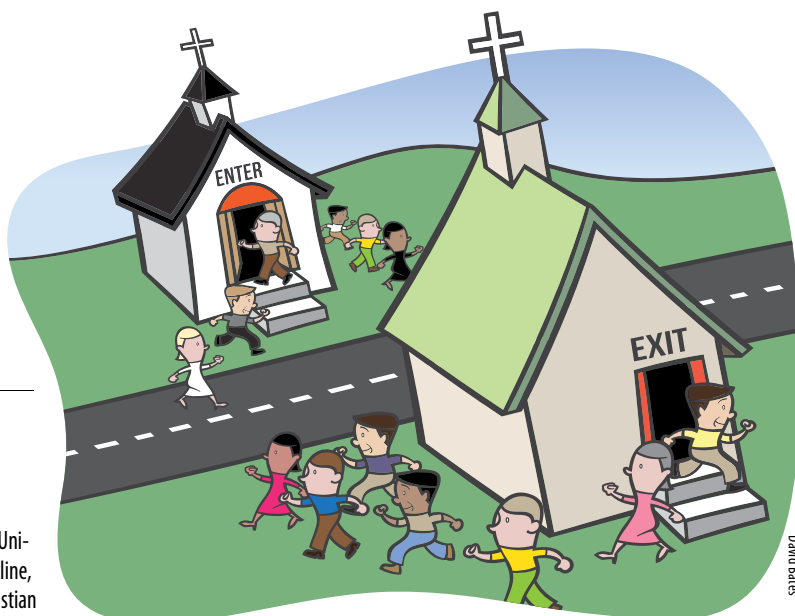
## FAITH MATTERS

# Are People Really Leaving the Church?

Recent research at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University questions the popular notion that American Christianity is on the decline, particularly among young adults. Citing misuse by both secular and Christian authors, the Baylor research questions the use of data that supposedly affirms that people are leaving the Christian faith by the droves.

Using research from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) and the Pew Forum's *Religious Landscape*, the Baylor researchers observe that religion in America is certainly in constant change. The reality is that Americans do change churches more regularly than in the past. The fact Americans more readily switch churches, however, does not necessarily represent the abandonment of faith.

Switching is a major phenomenon that needs increased research, but switching does not equal abandonment. In fact, the percentage of people calling themselves atheist in America has remained at 4 percent for the last 60 years. The Baylor researchers note that not one published study in a referred journal has documented a dramatic falling away or



David Bates

abandoning of the Christian faith in the United States. They conclude that, all too often, well-intended Christian authors are simply mimicking the secular media mantra that Christianity in America is floundering. Relying on shoddy research, anecdotal evidence, or avoidance of hundreds of empirical studies that document the vibrancy of American Christianity creates a picture that Baylor researchers suggest is old and tired with wrongheaded conclusions that cannot be substantiated.

See Byron Johnson, *More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How It Could Matter More* (Templeton Press, 2011).

**BYRON KLAUS**, president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

## PLUSTEN

# Ground Zero

Lady Liberty looked on  
as twins she birthed collapsed,  
while we knelt down in grief and shock  
to call on God and ask  
that He would bless America  
and comfort those deprived,  
of parents, children, siblings, mates,  
who on that Tuesday died.  
Admitting fear, we asked the Lord  
to shield us from attack,  
and give us hope to carry on  
in spite of what we lacked.  
And 10 years later we still pray  
that God will heal our land,  
as we confess our need for Him  
and faith to trust His plan.

**GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS**, Mercer Island, Washington

Stockphoto

## ■ GROWING LEADERS

# IRON SHARPENS IRON

**How do you bring all the leadership traits together** to complete the process of growing leaders? You do it by creating an atmosphere of continual development. This may be the single most important piece of the entire leadership puzzle; this is where other leaders emerge.

Developing others is vital to success now and in the future. This applies to any endeavor. Whether we are building a business or growing a church, strategic planning calls for the emergence of future leaders. The Bible states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV). The current leader is accountable and responsible for developing these new leaders. We cannot delegate this.

Before we begin developing others, we must be improving ourselves. Continual learning and growing are essential in creating leaders. It is impossible to teach what we do not know, especially in the field of leadership development. The best teachers lead by example. They invest in themselves by reading great books, listening to audio programs, seeking wise counsel, and investing time with those from whom they can learn. The Bible says, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17, NKJV).

Leadership is a personal venture. We can exert tremendous energy into creating leaders, but only those who want it will accept the challenge and rise to the top. One of the biggest mistakes a leader can make is investing time with someone who is

not ready to hear and apply teachings on leadership. A leader wastes valuable time on those who are not ready to grow. A future leader will stand out and become a prime candidate in whom to invest.

Change is inevitable, but self-development is optional. Teach those who are willing to learn and watch your organization reach new heights.

**JAMES L. CASTELLANO**, Emmaus, Pennsylvania

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## ■ UPWORDS

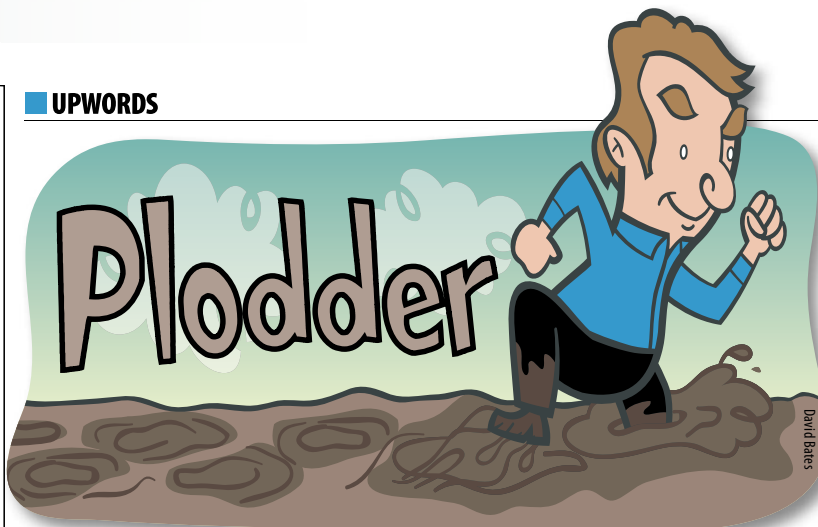
### ■ UTHTRAX

## The Doug & Jon Show

If you are looking for a fun, Christ-honoring Internet site for your students, visit [www.thedougandjonshow.com](http://www.thedougandjonshow.com). Since many young people spend hours on the Internet, youth experts and ordained ministers Doug Hutchcraft and Jon Taylor decided to use this medium "to be a bridge from today's youth culture to the Cross."

This contemporary site is jammed with notes, blogs, and hilarious videos (I loved *Jesse's World*, *The Science of English: Lesson 1*) and cartoons (Doug and Jon's Shorts). The site features Doug, Jon, and Kara (the host of Café de Kara) in humorous videos and candid video blogs that address tough issues young people face. The website has received hundreds of thousands of unique hits from visitors in 95 countries. More than 16,000 young people have indicated they prayed on the site with Doug, Jon, or Kara to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior.

**DAVE VEERMAN**, Naperville, Illinois



**A friend had an oft-repeated motto, "Plod on, plod on."** He was a businessman and had known what it was to be well-off and what it meant to lose almost everything. Nevertheless, through it all, his faith in God never wavered. He kept on going; he kept on trusting God; he kept on serving others any way he could. For many years, and particularly toward the end of his life, he spent hour upon hour praying for the ministers of Alaska.

For most of us, plodding has a negative connotation. As American men and ministers, we are often encouraged to emulate the fast-burners. But if we never approach their level of success, we can easily become deluded into thinking we are failures. But our ultimate measure of success will not be how fast we moved, or how visible our ministry, but how faithfully we obeyed the voice of the Spirit.

We often equate the promised renewing of our strength in Isaiah 40:31 with soaring like an eagle, or running fast and tirelessly. However, Isaiah also says, "They will walk and not be faint." God understands not everyone will soar, nor be noted for his speed. He does, however, make provision for the walker.

If God enables you to soar, soar as high as you can. If God enables you to run, run as fast and as far as you can. But remember, there will be situations where many of us will only be able to walk. In those times, "Plod on, plod on."

**JACK AIKEN**, Eagle River, Alaska





## FAMILY MEMORIES

# Teaching the True Meaning of Christmas

**H**oliday activities make families scatter like leaves on a windy day. Here is how you can bring families together while helping parents teach the true meaning of Christmas.

Give each family an empty basket and encourage them to pack it throughout the holidays for a needy person. The time spent focusing on someone else gives parents opportunities to remind their children of God's gracious gift to us — how satisfied He is sharing His treasure. As their basket and anticipation swells, kids may hurriedly put in final treats or creatively decorate the basket. When they bring their basket to church for distribution, it will be filled with rich family memories of a shared goal.

BRENDA NIXON, Mount Vernon, Ohio

## HOLY LAUGHTER

# We Wish You a P.C. Christmas

Top 10 politically correct Christmas — excuse me, Holiday — songs:

10. Chestnuts Roasting on an Environmentally Friendly Fuel Source
9. Rudolph, the Endangered and Exploited Specie
8. We Three Politically Oppressive Patriarchs
7. Rocking Around the Recycled, Flame-retardant, Artificial Holiday Tree
6. All I want for Christmas is a Dental Plan
5. Frosty, the Snowperson
4. I Saw Mommy Suing Santa Claus for Sexual Harassment
3. I'm Dreaming of a Racially Diverse Christmas
2. I'll Be Home for Ramadan (or Chanukah or Kwanzaa or Winter Solstice)
1. We Wish You a Nonsectarian Holiday

At the risk of coming across as The Grinch, Ebenezer Scrooge, and Harry Potter all gift-wrapped into one big humbug, I propose putting some P.C. in our Christmas celebration. But before you cancel your subscription, let me change the meaning of P.C. to purposeful concession.

God made some purposeful concessions on the first Christmas morning. Paul writes in Philippians 2:5–8: "Christ Jesus . . . being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,

## MYTHS&FACTS

According to some, including Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly, host of *The O'Reilly Factor*, our secular society is waging war on Christmas. O'Reilly, pushing back against the generic Happy Holidays greeting, created a bumper sticker that declares, "We say Merry Christmas."

One frontline of the Christmas conflict often seems to be in public schools. Many people believe anything from students singing Christian Christmas carols to calling the Christmas/New Year break Christmas vacation violates the separation of church and state and is unconstitutional. Not so, according to the Alliance Defense Fund, a legal group that defends religious liberty. According to the ADF's Christmas document *Myths & Facts*:

- Students in public schools *may* sing religious carols during school activities such as choir without offending the U.S. Constitution (if the school's secular purpose is advancing students' knowledge of society's cultural and religious heritage).
- It is *not* unconstitutional for school officials to refer to a school break as a Christmas holiday.
- Public schools do *not* have to recognize all religious holidays if they recognize Christmas.
- Neither teachers nor students are constitutionally banned from saying Merry Christmas in public schools.
- Public schools *can* have students study the religious origins of Christmas and read the biblical accounts of the birth of Christ.
- Public schools *may* display religious symbols.

For more information, visit [www.alliancedefensefund.org](http://www.alliancedefensefund.org), click on About ADF link, then click on Get Resources for free documents. If you feel someone has violated your constitutional rights, contact ADF at 1-800-TELL-ADF, 15100 N. 90th Street, Scottsdale, AZ 85260, or [www.alliancedefensefund.org/LegalHelp](http://www.alliancedefensefund.org/LegalHelp).

DIANNE E. BUTTS, Pueblo, Colorado

# War on Christmas



being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!"  
Now, let's all sing, *We Wish You a P.C. Christmas*.

JAMES N. WATKINS, Upland, Indiana

## MANAGING CONFLICT

# Antagonists in the Church

Jesus said people would recognize His followers by the love they had for each other (John 13:35). Sadly, anger instead of love, division instead of unity, and judgment instead of grace often mark churches. In one respect, we should not be surprised since churches are comprised of fallible, sinful people. At times we fail, misunderstand, aggravate, harm, and offend. Wherever two or three people gather, conflict is likely to occur.

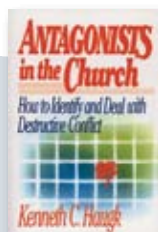
But some people seem to thrive on discord, and can cause irreparable harm. Kenneth Haugk calls them *antagonists*. He has written an excellent book to help church leaders identify and deal with antagonists in their midst.

Haugk published *Antagonists in the Church* in 1988 (Augsburg Publishing House). However, I only recently discovered the book when I discussed conflict with other school board members. What an insightful and intensely practical work. As a pastor and clinical psychologist, Haugk knows what he is talking about.

The book will help you prepare for and identify antagonists, understand their disruptive strategies, and respond appropriately. In Haugk's words, "This is a book of care: care for congregations, care for leaders, care for members, and care for those who are antagonists. . . . This is also a book of hope: hope for congregations, hope for leaders of congregations, hope for members, and hope for pastors. When readers understand and apply the principles of this book, they can prevent or at least reduce much of the pain and suffering caused by antagonism. Even in the midst of unhealthy antagonistic conflict, congregations and their leaders can grow in hope."

A 64-page study guide is also available.

DAVE VEERMAN, Naperville, Illinois



## YOUNG PASTOR

# Beware of Straw Men

A few years ago I served as an unpaid advisor for a high-profile political campaign in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. After a year and a half on the inside, I quickly learned the No. 1 axiom of modern politics: don't attack the candidate, attack the caricature.

Most political advertisements take a grain of truth — a vote, an endorsement, and a past term paper —

and blow it out of proportion to paint the opposition in the worst possible light. If candidates can prove their opponents are extreme, then they will be the welcomed choice.

What does this have to do with the ministry? Since I began preaching, I have noticed myself drawn to the same straw man tactics I found on the campaign trail. The tactics are subtler, to be sure, but they exist. If we are not careful, we will exposit a Scriptural text to preach against the caricature of other people or movements.

This is easy to do. When there is a difference of opinion on a doctrinal position that is in disagreement with the church's historical doctrinal position, it is easy to find the most extreme quotes from the other side and use them as a template for the position we are knocking down. I have done this myself. Then I meet pastors on the opposing side who disagree with their doctrinal stance, and I find them completely different from the caricature I created.

The danger with this kind of preaching is we convince ourselves and the people to whom we minister that the real problems are outside, not inside the church. We ignore our own heart issues and focus instead on "the other guys."

I am still prone to this dangerous tendency, but God is slowly showing me that He is more interested in the motivations of my heart and the spiritual moorings of the people in my church.

As for those other guys I am so fond of preaching against? I am finding that their motivations might be purer than mine and God is sovereign over their hearts as He is over mine.

DANIEL DARLING is author of *Teen People of the Bible: Celebrity Profiles of Real Faith and Tragic Failure*. Visit <http://www.danieldarling.com>



## BOOMERS TO ZOOMERS

# A Digital Revolution Is Afoot

A recent article in Booz & Company's *Strategy + Business* e-newsletter<sup>1</sup> highlights a conversation with historian Elin Whitney-Smith, in which she posits the impact the digital information phenomenon will have on contemporary society. Citing this phenomenon as the sixth great revolution in history, she posits that it is having the same effect on commerce and society as the invention of the Gutenberg Press, which brought in the fifth great revolution.

Of particular interest to church leaders is the idea that these revolutions are the result of innovations in the way people communicate with one another. With every major

technological innovation in communication comes the likelihood that those relying solely on the older media will lose their influence, or better yet their voice, with those who adopt the newer media as their primary means of communication.

Since church leaders are the primary voices responsible for contextualizing the gospel to their communities, the medium for doing so is vital. As Paul notes, "How can they hear unless, someone tells them?" (Romans 10:14, CEV). To which Whitney-Smith might add, "How can

you tell them if you don't speak their language?"

### NOTES

1. Art Kleiner, *Strategy + Business*, "A Long-Wave Theory on Today's Digital Revolution." [www.strategy-business.com/article/00074?gko=e0cf7](http://www.strategy-business.com/article/00074?gko=e0cf7) Accessed May 20, 2011.
2. Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from The Contemporary English Version [computer file]: with Apocrypha. — electronic ed. — Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, ©1995 by the American Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

RANDY WALLS, director of continuing education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri





## ■ SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE SUNDAY

### What Pregnancy Centers Offer — *for Free*

**January 15, 2012, is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.** In 1984, President Ronald Reagan designated the third Sunday in January as the first National Sanctity of Human Life Day to coincide with the 11th anniversary of the Supreme Court case that found abortion was constitutionally protected.

Today, more than 2,100 pro-life pregnancy centers across the United States offer alternatives to abortion as well as many other services, which vary from center to center, but may include:

- mentoring to women and men in an unplanned pregnancy.
- nondiagnostic ultrasound.
- material goods including maternity clothing, baby clothing, furniture, diapers, and other needs for newborns.
- finding a maternity home or private home for

pregnant women of any age needing a place to stay.

- parenting classes.
- referral for adoption information.
- counseling for post-abortion trauma (no matter how long afterward).
- Bible studies for women and men struggling after an abortion, which may include a memorial service for participants' unborn children.
- referrals for medical needs or other counseling, and much more.

Often these services are free to clients. How do they do it? Through volunteer staff, fundraisers, and donations from individuals, churches, and businesses.

If someone in your congregation can benefit from any of these services, find your nearest pregnancy center at [Optionline.org](http://Optionline.org).

**DIANNE E. BUTTS**, Pueblo, Colorado

## ■ LEADERLIFE

NPR's program *On Point* recently reported on new research being released about the effects of power in a business context. The conclusion of the sociological study was that "The higher they rose (men or women), the more likely they were to consider or commit adultery." The researchers in the study theorized that this growing trend had much to do with their observation that power breeds a particularly blinding arrogance that borders on entitlement. The scandals resulting from the actions of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Dominique Strauss-Kahn are only recent examples of ethical compromise that occur in positions of power. Unfortunately, the visible failures of church leaders in positions of influence have greatly reduced the possibility of Christian critique.

### The Nature of Power

Abraham Lincoln's observation about power was that "nearly all men can handle adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." The nature of power is that it is ultimately the potential for influence. Power has the capability of blurring our understanding of the way we see those around us and ourselves. Power is a great seducer, and naïveté about the potential for the destruction that power coupled with position can bring is notable.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said that, "Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power." Christians need not avoid positions of influence, but there are critical differences between the power of human initiative and the eternal power of God. Most notably, God's power does not require trampling the weak to arrive at personal achievement. God's power does not require subordinating others to manifest its greatness.

**BYRON KLAUS**, president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

## ■ WISDOM FROM THE WORD

### Famine of *Faithfulness*

"Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6). A church sign read, "It's better to be faithful than famous." Yet, there seems to be a famine of faithfulness in our culture. Marriages break up from a lack of faithfulness. Business partnerships dissolve. Friendships end in bitterness. Even churches suffer because of a lack of faithfulness. When things are inconvenient or difficult, circumstances arise, many people bail.

So what does *faithful* mean? It means:

- loyal, reliable, trusted.
- showing a strong sense of duty or responsibility.
- a faithful worker, true to one's word, promises, vows.

Faithfulness toward God begins with practical faithfulness toward our spouse and family, to our church and ministry responsibilities, to our financial commitments. We are to live out our faith every day of the week, in every action we take, in every word we speak, and in every relationship we make.

God is challenging us to pursue faithfulness regardless of the personal cost, effort required, or the lack of resulting public acclaim. Everyone does not have the same opportunities; nor do we all have the same abilities. But we all have something. We have the capacity to be faithful in our own condition and commitments.

May the Lord help us keep the commitments we make. In fact, the greatest approbation we will ever receive is when we hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). Indeed, it is far more desirable to be faithful than to be famous.

**PATTI ANN THOMPSON**, Kansas City, Missouri





## ■ UPSIDE-DOWN PERSPECTIVE

### Thirsty-Hearted

**One of the most remarkable plants in nature** is the *ibervillea sonora*. This desert plant that looks like a chunk of wood, can exist for indefinite periods without soil or even water. Each year before the rainy season it sends out a few roots in hope of getting enough water to produce flowers and fruit.

The New York Botanical Garden had one of these plants in a display case. For seven springs it sent out little anticipatory shoots looking for water. Finding none, it simply dried up again, hoping for better luck next year.

In the eighth year of no water, the people at the New York Botanical Garden, without realizing it was a living plant, threw it away as a lifeless piece of wood. No one thought to splash water on it. Onlookers were denied access to the plant's true story and its fruitfulness.

Many discarded, lifeless people come into our churches, enroll in our Bible studies, enter our support groups, and volunteer in our outreach ministries. Bereft of soil and thirsty, with barely enough energy to send out another anticipatory shoot, they hope someone will notice their true value.

Jesus, reflecting the heart of God, looked beyond the outer appearance of humanity and saw their hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). He recognized their potential.

He, the Living Water, calls us in today's uncertain world, to see as He sees, and to recommit to splash the living water of encouragement, kindness, and care on those He sends among us. They also have stories to tell and fruit to develop.

**PATTI ANN THOMPSON**, Kansas City, Missouri



## ■ WHAT IN THE WORLD

### UNMINED WEALTH

In his classic book, *Fifty Years in Alaska*, Carl Lomen recounts the gold rush that drew tens of thousands of would-be miners to Nome in 1900. In one chapter he describes how gold-hungry seekers unearthed their fortune barely 6 inches below the surface of the treeless tundra — the same permafrost on which native Eskimos lived in humble shanties scabbling to survive fishing offshore and hunting wild game. These who had dwelled on this land for hundreds of years before the white man came were unaware of the treasure to which they were entitled beneath their feet.

Lomen writes, "Poverty-stricken, these Eskimos had unwittingly dragged their skin boats for centuries over a golden horde."

Similarly, many Christ-followers drag along day after day relying on their own strength to shoulder the cross. They are unaware of the Holy Spirit within them into whose power they can tap. They are wealthier than they realize. This is what the apostle Paul wanted to communicate to the Christians in Ephesus when he wrote, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13,14).

Source: Carl Lomen, *Fifty Years in Alaska* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc. 1954) 38.

**GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS**, Mercer Island, Washington









Web-only articles

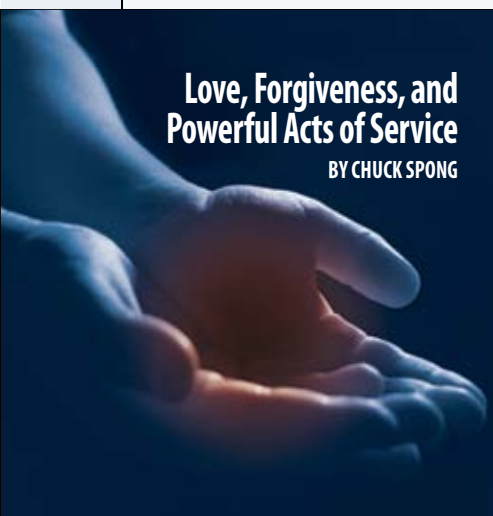


**Pastors know they will eventually have problems in their churches they must confront.** But making the difficult decision about how to handle the situation may not solve the problem. How do you communicate your decision to your congregation, especially when that decision resulted in a staff member's termination? Tracey Carpenter and Susan Chiasson contend that, "How you tell a church about a hard decision can determine whether people will accept the decision and move on, or question it and quibble over its merits for weeks, months, or even years." Here are some valuable tips from professional consultants that will help you walk through these tough situations.

## The Pastor and the Multicultural Church

BY TIMOTHY HARRIS

**While the homogenous church growth philosophy has its place, the United States is quickly becoming a multiethnic nation.** How does this multiethnicity play into the makeup of the church? Timothy Harris successfully pastors a multiethnic church. In this article he shares some of the benefits of a multicultural church. He also provides some guidelines for keeping the unity of the faith among those of differing cultures. While this is not always easy, Harris believes, "The gathering of people from every tribe and nation can lead to an excitement and momentum that is well worth the effort." Learn how you can lead your church into becoming a multicultural church.



## Love, Forgiveness, and Powerful Acts of Service

BY CHUCK SPONG

**In today's culture, people often associate the word *compassion* with serving the poor, caring for those in need, sharing our resources, and community service.** Some believe it is culturally popular to volunteer to serve the under-resourced. But, as Christ followers, what should our motivation be for serving our community?

According to Chuck Spong, "Our motivation — for love, forgiveness, and acts of service (no matter how well-intentioned) — must come from nothing less than a pure, surrendered response to the love of God 'poured into our hearts' (Romans 5:5)." We must love God (have an encounter with Jesus) and love people (have a life of serving). When these components are in us, the Lord will move on people's hearts and open them to His redemptive work so we can share God's plan of redemption.



## How Do You Heal the Wounds You Cannot See?

BY WAYNE TESCH

**"Where was God when I was being molested?" asks a 10-year-old girl.** How would you answer her? Many of us have grown up in churches where we heard messages about the evils of adultery and abortion. But how many sermons have we heard on the evils of child abuse? Wayne Tesch, founder of Royal Family Kids, believes pastors need to address this topic because of the rapid increase of this blight on our families. This compelling article will challenge you to fulfill God's calling for your church to help the young victims in your city who are experiencing child abuse.

## Emerging Engagement: The Growing Social Conscience of Pentecostalism

BY KENT DUNCAN

**During its 53rd General Council, the Assemblies of God added a fourth reason for being** to affirm that the Assemblies of God exists "to be a people who demonstrate God's love and compassion for all the world." From the earliest days of 20th-century Pentecostal renewal, Spirit-filled believers have struggled to define how much social engagement should accompany preaching the gospel. In this document, Kent Duncan chronicles the history of social engagement within the Assemblies of God and offers some areas the Assemblies of God needs to address as it moves forward into a Pentecostal theology of social engagement.







## STUDY CLAIMS RELIGIOSITY LINKED TO OBESITY



**M**aybe it's the plethora of cookies distributed in Sunday School. Possibly the choices of doughnuts in the foyer before the morning service. Perhaps the meaty pizzas that are a staple of youth group gatherings. Or is the culprit the fried chicken, potato salad, nachos, and cheesy macaroni laced with ham at the Sunday evening potluck?

Whatever the reasons, many churchgoers apparently are too comfortable with unhealthy food choices that lead to weight gain.

A study by Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago suggests that young adults who frequently engage in church activities are 50 percent more likely to become obese by middle age than young adults who have no religious involvement.

"It's possible that getting together and associating good works and happiness with eating unhealthy foods could lead to the development of habits that are associated with greater body weight and obesity," says Matthew Feinstein, the study's lead investigator.

"... Getting together and associating good works and happiness with eating unhealthy foods could lead to the development of habits that are associated with greater body weight and obesity."

— Matthew Feinstein

Previous Northwestern University medical research established a link between religious involvement and obesity in middle-aged and older adults. The new study indicates that normal-weight younger adults who attend church functions frequently — at least weekly — gain weight at twice the rate of those who stay away from church-related events. Researchers tracked 2,433 men and women for 18 years. Those involved had normal body weight when researchers began monitoring them between the ages 20 to 32.

Obesity is linked to substantial risks of developing diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. Those who carry too many pounds also are likelier to die younger.

The findings do not necessarily mean that spirituality is an indication of poorer health. The study's authors acknowledged that those who are more deeply involved in their church tend to smoke cigarettes and drink liquor less frequently than the nonreligious. And other studies have shown that Christians overall are more satisfied with life and less anxious about the future than nonbelievers.

Part of that contentment stems from the fact committed Christians are less likely to divorce. On the other hand, married people — especially young adults — tend to gain weight in the first few years of wedded bliss.

**While generosity may not be an inherited trait,** parents who model bountiful giving are more likely to have children who follow in their footsteps.

Research from *Heart of the Donor*, an in-depth study conducted by Grey Matter Research & Consulting of Phoenix, shows that when it comes to generosity, what parents say and do play a big role in influencing children. Parents who give and volunteer regularly influence the charitable activities of adult children more than household income, ethnicity, education, or any other factor.

"Parental behavior has a very substantial correlation with the eventual behavior of children once they are grown," says Ron Sellers, president of Grey Matter.

For example, 55 percent of adult children whose parents gave money frequently at church when the children were in the household now give themselves. On the other hand, only 24 percent of children whose parents rarely donated to a house of



## Parents Influence Adult Kid Behavior in Giving

worship now donate to church. The statistics are similar when it comes to giving to nonprofits: 52 percent of children with bighearted parents have followed the pattern. Just half that ratio give today among those whose parents didn't donate much in their formative years.

The study found that parents who backed up their actions with words also made a bigger

impression on their kids. For instance, 51 percent of adult children whose parents encouraged them to give to nonprofits when growing up now do so themselves, compared to 31 percent whose parents rarely talked to them about benevolence.

Likewise, 45 percent of adult children whose parents often urged them to volunteer now are volunteers, compared to 20 percent whose parents didn't encourage them to volunteer as youngsters.

The study concluded that parents with little or no history of giving or volunteering have about a one in four likelihood of raising a child who turns out to be a donor. Those who went to church and volunteered regularly are apt to have offspring follow in their footsteps in four out of five cases.

Overall, *Heart of the Donor* found that 62 percent of American children who are now grown had a parent who took them to church frequently, 52 percent had a parent who gave money to church, and 33 percent had a parent who volunteered at church.





## CHURCHES EXPERIENCING LONG-TERM ECONOMIC DOLDRUMS

**T**he economic downturn that hit the country in 2008 continues to have an impact on churches well into 2011.

David A. Roozen of Faith Communities Today at Hartford Institute for Religion Research compiled *Holy Toll*, a study of the recession's impact on more than 11,000 American congregations. The survey shows that income in 58 percent of Assemblies of God churches declined following the recession, while 11 percent dipped but have since rebounded. The remaining 31 percent of Assemblies of God churches report stable or increased giving.

While 40 percent of Assemblies of God congregations are in good or excellent financial health, a larger number — 43 percent — call financial conditions tight.

While *Holy Toll* indicates that 40 percent of Assemblies of God congregations are in good or excellent financial health today, a larger number — 43 percent — call financial conditions tight. Disturbingly, 16 percent of Assemblies of God churches report financial distress.

"The recession hit just about every kind of congregation equally across the board faith-wise," Roozen says. "Large churches, small churches, north, south, east, west, rural, urban."

Among all churches, in the past decade the number experiencing financial difficulty has more than doubled

to nearly 20 percent, the study indicates. That is due largely to unemployment having an impact among a large number of attendees in more than one in four congregations. Requests for pastoral counseling, cash assistance, and emergency housing increased among all types of churches during the recession.

Churches implemented various cost-cutting measures to cope with a decline in income resulting from the economic decline. Among evangelical congregations, 29 percent postponed capital projects, 27 percent reduced mission and benevolence giving, 25 percent froze or reduced salaries, 17 percent delayed filling staff positions, and 9 percent laid off employees. Among all types of congregations, half a million people either lost their jobs or had their salaries cut.

A decline in giving impacts the life of the church, Roozen reports. Attendance dwindles, fewer people volunteer, and spiritual vitality wanes. This, in turn, can cause conflict that feeds on itself.

"When there is economic stress, organizations have to make decisions," Roozen says. "The potential for conflict always goes up as economic tensions go up. Some people quit participating in programs. Some withhold money. Some leave the church."

The recession notwithstanding, Roozen notes that American churches are on a 10-year decrease in financial health. Evangelical congregations are now experiencing challenges to organizational vitality that mainline groups have encountered for decades, he says.

## AG Educators Featured in Pentecostal Studies Book

Two Evangel University professors are editors of a recent academic textbook that features perspectives from various scholars exploring how Pentecostals have reacted to offenses they have perpetuated and experienced. Martin William Mittelstadt and Geoffrey William Sutton are coeditors of *Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Restoration: Multidisciplinary Studies from a Pentecostal Perspective*.

Mittelstadt, associate professor of New Testament, and Sutton, professor of psychology, also have individual chapters in the 229-page book. Other contributors include Diane Awbrey and Marilyn Quigley, both of whom are associate professors of English at Evangel University; Robert Berg, New Testament professor at Evangel; Jeff Hittenberger, provost at Vanguard University; Johan Mostert, professor of community psychology at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary; and Lois E. Olena, visiting professor of practical theology and Jewish studies at AGTS.

Mittelstadt notes that early Pentecostals took great pleasure in their counterculture worldview, yet he questions whether the breadth of Spirit-inspired speech has waned over time.

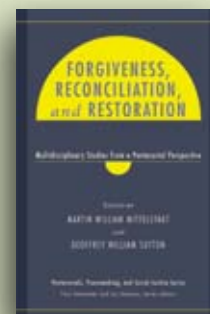
Berg agrees that American Pentecostals today are part of mainstream culture, rather than being ostracized for emotional excesses and doctrinal peculiarities of a century ago.

"On the upward path of respectability, we have lost some of our identity," Berg writes. "In part, this was because everybody else grew more like us, especially in their 'contemporary' Sunday service. But in large measure, we were the ones who grew more like our evangelical relatives."

Olena, who is executive director of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, tackles the checkered history of white American Pentecostals toward black Pentecostals. Olena recounts the humiliation endured by Bob Harrison, the first African-American graduate of Bethany College in 1951. After graduation, the Northern California-Nevada District of the Assemblies of God denied Harrison ministerial credentials because of his race.

Various Assemblies of God districts and indeed the Fellowship as a whole continued to wrestle with racial issues into the 1960s, Olena says.

"Though some regions of the country showed readiness to license blacks, the granting of full ordination remained only a story from the past and a distant hope for the future for people like Harrison," Olena writes. "Such double-mindedness paralyzed the Assemblies of God — partially if not fully — preventing it from advancing beyond the attitudes and actions of the surrounding society on these issues."





I N T R O D U C T I O N

# COMPASSION MINISTRY: EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

► BY RICHARD L. SCHOONOVER

**A**t the 53rd General Council in Orlando, Florida, delegates took a decisive step when they approved Resolution 1, "FOURTH REASON FOR BEING," that modified the Assemblies of God's purpose statement by adding: "To be a people who demonstrate God's love and compassion for all the world (Psalm 112:9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27)."

The other three reasons for being are:

- a. To be an agency of God for evangelizing the world (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16).
- b. To be a corporate body in which man may worship God (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- c. To be a channel of God's purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:12).<sup>1</sup>

Those who spoke against this resolution were concerned that the Assemblies of God would follow the same path as other denominations and lose its evangelistic fervor and begin preaching a social gospel. In reality, though, many Assemblies of God churches are already doing compassion ministry and are finding that compassion ministry provides avenues for evangelism that traditional ministries do not provide. In the *Enrichment* interview on page 53, we visit with three pastors who have touched lives

through compassion ministry and have seen many people come to the Lord through their outreaches.

Because of this General Council resolution, the *Enrichment* staff, along with the encouragement of the executive leadership team, felt it would be appropriate to address compassion ministry. We desire to encourage churches that are doing compassion ministry, provide ideas and resources to help make compassion ministry more effective, and give guidance to churches wanting to start compassion ministry.

Because evangelism is in the DNA of the Assemblies of God, an evangelistic component is common to each article. Evangelism has two dimensions: your witness to individuals and your witness to the community. Several of the articles stress working with established secular and religious compassion ministries and becoming involved in the various activities in your community that lend themselves to compassion ministry. This gives church members a chance to work alongside

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others and opportunities to share the gospel.

Compassion ministry is not just for urban churches. Poverty is often more prevalent in rural communities. "Rural Compassion for the Harvest: Small Towns, Big Possibilities," page 60, provides timely tips for small churches to have an effective compassion outreach in their communities.

Not much will happen in the lives of those to whom you minister unless there is a systemic change in their lifestyle. "Hand Out or Hand Up?: Empowering the Poor," page 32, and "Helping Families in Crisis," page 72, provide guidelines for helping families make these systemic changes through a relationship with Jesus Christ and Christian mentoring/discipleship.

One of the growing segments of our country and church is the immigrant population. Who are the immigrants in your community you can reach with the gospel? Samuel Rodriguez, in "Mercy Rising: A Call to Love the Immigrant," page 66, gives key principles for reaching immigrants.

More than anything, the *Enrichment* journal

staff wants to communicate that compassion ministry is at the heart of God. Psalm 146:7–9 reads: "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked."

Compassion ministry is more than handing out groceries and clothing, cleaning up your community, or working hand-in-hand with community organizations. Compassion ministry is loving people just as God through Christ loves them. As you read this issue of *Enrichment*, prayerfully consider ways you and your church can make a difference in your community through compassion ministry. Then take the necessary steps to make it happen. 🙏

#### NOTE

1. General Council Constitution, Article V. STATEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS, Section 10. The Church and Its Mission, pages 87, 88.

*Assemblies of  
God churches  
are finding that  
compassion  
ministry provides  
avenues for  
evangelism  
that traditional  
ministries do  
not provide.*



**RICHARD L. SCHOONOVER**, associate editor, *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri



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**COMPASSION MINISTRY:**  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# COMPASSIONATE CHRIST, COMPASSIONATE CHURCH

► BY **GEORGE O. WOOD** with **GEORGE PAUL WOOD**

Compassion played a crucial role in the ministries of Christ and the New Testament church. Should it not play a crucial role in our ministries as well?

**H**ave you ever lost sleep worrying about a matter of principle? On Thursday, August 6, 2009, I experienced such a sleepless night. That afternoon, at the General Council meeting in Orlando, Florida, delegates debated a resolution to amend our Constitution and make compassion<sup>1</sup> the Assemblies of God's fourth reason for being. (The first three are evangelism, worship, and discipleship.) After debate, the delegates voted, and the resolution lost.

That night I could not sleep. *Here we are, a compassionate Movement telling the world we are not compassionate, I thought. This does not add up. This does not make sense.*

I determined in the early morning hours of Friday, August 7, that I was going to yield the chair during the next business session, go to the floor, and appeal to the delegates to reconsider Thursday's action and adopt the resolution. One of the most satisfying moments in my life came when the delegates did just that.

Some feared that adding compassion as a reason for being would dilute our Fellowship's historic resolve to do "the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen."<sup>2</sup> Others worried that adding compassion would lead us down the slippery slope to the "Social Gospel" our fathers and mothers in the faith explicitly rejected. These are understandable concerns. I do not want to be part of any Christian movement that discounts evangelism or disregards orthodoxy in favor of mere social or political action. But I do not fear that adding compassion to our reasons for being will do either. Instead, I worry that discounting or disregarding compassion will result in a less-than-biblical form of ministry. Compassion played a crucial role in the ministries of Christ and the New Testament church. Should it not play a crucial role in our ministries as well?

### The Paradigm of Jesus' Ministry

Let me begin with Jesus' ministry. Luke 4:14-30 tells about Jesus preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth, His hometown. Jesus read Isaiah 61:1,2 and 58:6: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then He said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18,19,21).

Notice four things about Jesus' use of these passages.

#### Paradigm

First, Jesus provides a *paradigm* that describes the essence of His ministry. Later, when an imprisoned John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether He was the Messiah, Jesus pointed to His healings and exorcisms

and said, "*The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor*" (Luke 7:22, emphasis added). Similarly, when Peter preached to Cornelius, he alluded to these passages, saying, "God *anointed* Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38, emphasis added). Isaiah 61:1,2 and 58:6 prophesy the essence of Jesus' ministry.

#### Power

Second, Jesus' use of these passages focuses on the *power* of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit of the Lord," Jesus said, "anointed me," a reference to Jesus' baptism when "the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove" (Luke 3:22).

According to Luke, the Spirit was intimately involved with Jesus' life and ministry. Mary became pregnant with Jesus through the Holy Spirit (1:35). The Spirit moved Simeon to testify that Jesus was "your [i.e., God's] salvation," "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" (2:25ff.). After His baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness for His contest with the devil (4:1ff.). Following that, "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit" and began His teaching ministry (4:14,15).

When Jesus commissioned the 72 for ministry, and they returned, Jesus was "full of joy through the Holy Spirit" and praised His Father for working through "little children" (10:21). Jesus promised His disciples that "your Father in heaven [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (11:13). He promised His persecuted disciples that "the Holy Spirit will teach you at the time what you should say" (12:12). At every stage of Jesus' life and ministry the Holy Spirit was present and active.

#### Proclamation

Third, Jesus' use of Isaiah 61:1,2 and 58:6 focuses on the role of proclamation in His ministry. The Spirit anointed Jesus: "to proclaim good news to the poor," "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners," and "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18,19). Underlying the infinitive "to proclaim" are two Greek

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*When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, He proclaimed it to the whole person. The gospel touches every aspect of a person's existence.*

verbs: *euangelisasthai* (from which we get the word evangelize) and *chē̄ruxai*. The words are more or less synonymous and sometimes used in tandem (e.g., Luke 8:1; 9:2,6). Luke summarizes Jesus' ministry through Galilee this way: "But he said, 'I must proclaim the good news [*euangelisasthai*] of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.' And he kept on preaching [*kē̄ryssōn*] in the synagogues of Judea" (4:43,44). What message did Jesus proclaim?

- "good news to the poor" (4:18)
- "freedom for the prisoners" and "recovery of sight for the blind" (4:18)
- "the kingdom of God" (4:43; 8:1; 16:16; cf. 9:2,6, where Jesus commissioned the 72 to proclaim the same message)
- "repentance for forgiveness of sins ... in his name" (24:47)
- "peace" (Acts 10:36)

Given the prominence that the kingdom of God plays in Jesus' ministry, we might summarize His proclamation this way: Jesus announced the establishment of the kingdom of God, which resulted in forgiveness, healing, and peace for those who repented and trusted in Him, especially the poor among them.

#### Performance

Fourth, Jesus *performed* the kingdom of God. He did not just talk about forgiveness or healing. He forgave and healed. His words are examples of what philosophers call "performative utterances." Performative utterances do not describe the world; they change it. In Luke 5:17–26, Jesus said to the lame man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." He proved that He had authority to forgive this man's sins by healing him. When Jesus said, "get up, take your mat, and go home," Luke reports, "*Immediately*, [the man] stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God" (emphasis added). In 18:35–43, when Jesus said to a blind man, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you," Luke reports, "*Immediately* he received his sight" (emphasis added). Jesus' miracles demonstrated the truth and relevance of His proclamation. He told His critics, "if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (11:20; cf. Matthew 12:28, where "the Spirit of God" replaces "the finger of God").

In summary, Jesus Christ proclaimed and

performed the kingdom of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### Humanity's Three Needs

What needs did Jesus' proclamation and performance of the Kingdom meet in the lives of His hearers? Jesus' use of Isaiah 61:1,2 and 58:6 speak of proclamation:

- "to the poor"
- of "freedom for prisoners"
- of "recovery of sight for the blind"
- "to set free the oppressed"
- and "of the year of the Lord's favor"

These five items speak to the spiritual, physical, and socioeconomic needs of humanity. When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, He proclaimed it to the whole person. The gospel touches every aspect of a person's existence.

#### Spiritual need: forgiveness

First, the kingdom of God meets humanity's spiritual need for forgiveness. Luke 4:18 uses the phrases "freedom for the prisoners" and "to set the oppressed free." In their original context, Isaiah 61:1 and 58:6 reflect the covenantal connection between obedience and freedom and disobedience and oppression (Deuteronomy 28). Israel's disobedience resulted in Babylonian exile, but its repentance resulted in freedom from exile and return to the Promised Land. Freedom and forgiveness went hand in glove.

We can see the connection between freedom and forgiveness in the way Luke uses the Greek noun *aphesis*. In Luke 4:18, *aphesis* means "freedom." Elsewhere, however, it means "forgiveness," specifically the forgiveness of sins (1:77; 3:3; 24:47; cf. Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18). Luke often uses the verb *aphiēmi* with the similar meaning, "to forgive sins" (Luke 5:20–24; 7:47–49; 11:4; 12:10; 17:3,4; 23:34; cf. Acts 8:22). Jesus' two references to freedom in Luke 4:18 refer to forgiveness of sins.

Interestingly, Jesus stopped His reading of Isaiah 61:2 halfway through the verse. The verse in full reads: "to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor *and the day of vengeance of our God*" (emphasis added). By quoting only the first half of the verse, Jesus strongly and strategically implied that His ministry in this age was one of love and forgiveness rather than law and judgment.

### Physical need: healing

Second, the kingdom of God meets humanity's physical need for the healing of their bodies. Jesus declared that the Spirit anointed Him to proclaim "recovery of sight for the blind" (Luke 4:18; 18:35–43). His healing miracles proved that He was "Son of God" (4:40,41) and "the one who is to come," that is, the Messiah (7:19–23).

Luke groups Jesus' exorcism of demons among Jesus' healing miracles. These exorcisms prove that "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (11:20). He summarizes Jesus' whole ministry this way: "[Jesus] ... spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing" (9:11). Jesus commissioned His disciples and the 72 to do the same (9:2; 10:9). Jesus' miracles of healing prove His concern for the wellbeing of people's bodies. The Assemblies of God enshrined this concern in Article 12 of our Statement of Fundamental Truths: "Divine healing is an integral part of the gospel. Deliverance from sickness is provided for in the atonement, and is the privilege of all believers."<sup>3</sup>

### Socioeconomic need: provision and inclusion

Third, the kingdom of God meets humanity's socioeconomic needs for provision and inclusion. The Spirit anointed Jesus "to proclaim good news to the poor." Poverty can be spiritual (e.g., "poor in Spirit" [Matthew 5:3]). But in Luke and Acts, the word *poor* (Greek, *ptōchos*) is primarily socioeconomic. How is Jesus' kingdom ministry good news for the poor? At the level of proclamation, Jesus assures the poor who believe in Him that their fortunes in this age will be reversed in the age to come (Luke 6:20,21). By contrast, Jesus said to the rich and well fed: "Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry" (6:24,25).

Jesus taught a similar lesson about the reversal of fortune in His Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–31). Jesus also dignified the poor by praising their quiet sacrificial generosity (21:1–4) in contrast to the ostentatious but nonsacrificial gifts of the rich.

But Jesus' ministry went beyond the proclamation of the Kingdom to its performance. He fundamentally reoriented the way His disciples felt about and used their wealth.

He taught His disciples to eschew the accumulation of goods and practice generosity to the poor. End-times judgment "will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God" (12:21). Disciples need not worry about acquiring food or clothing; instead, they should "seek [God's] kingdom, and these things will be given to [them] as well" (12:31). Because God would give His disciples the Kingdom, Jesus commanded His disciples: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail" (12:32,33, cf. 18:22). Jesus taught His disciples to include the poor in their communal meals (14:13). When Zacchaeus the tax collector repented of his financial dishonesty and gave half his possessions to the poor, Jesus declared, "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:1–10).

Jesus' citation of Isaiah 58:6 and 61:2 strengthens this point about His disciples' newfound relationship to wealth. In Isaiah 58:6–8, the prophet criticized Israel's religious fasting because it failed to change their relationship with the poor. Speaking for God, the prophet asked a series of rhetorical questions: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear."

Similarly, when Jesus spoke of "the year of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61:2), His words had socioeconomic overtones. That year was the Jubilee Year, during which God commanded the Israelites to forgive their countrymen's debts, return them to their ancestral land, and — if they had become enslaved — emancipate them (Leviticus 25:8–55).

True religion — according to Isaiah and Jesus — provides for the poor. We cannot spiritualize the meaning of these passages about money. To do so will explain them away.

### The New Testament Church

Did the New Testament church pattern its ministry after that of Jesus? Yes. They proclaimed

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## *Have we overlooked how the first Christians performed the Kingdom with regard to the poor?*



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and performed the Kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit. They ministered to people's spiritual, physical, and socioeconomic needs.

We see this immediately in the Book of Acts. Acts 1:8 is the programmatic Scripture for the entire book. Jesus fulfilled His promise of power in Acts 2, and the immediate effect of the Holy Spirit upon them was speech — miraculous tongues (2:4,11) and evangelistic sermons (2:14–39). Throughout Acts, the Spirit empowered Jesus' disciples for a ministry of proclaiming the gospel: Peter before the Sanhedrin (4:8), Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26,29), Peter at Cornelius' house (Acts 10:19,44–48), and Barnabas and Saul on the eve of their first missionary journey (13:2).

The disciples also performed miracles: healing the lame (3:1–10; 9:32–36; 14:8–10), the sick (5:12–16; 19:11,12), the demonized (8:7; 16:16–18), the blind (9:17–19), and the dead (9:36–43; 20:7–12). Pentecostals expect “signs and wonders” to follow their evangelistic ministries as well, for this was the pattern in the Book of Acts (2:22,43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6,13; 14:3; 15:12).

Have we overlooked how the first Christians performed the Kingdom with regard to the poor? Acts 2:42–47 describes the life of the church after Pentecost. Verses 44,45 describe their socioeconomic practices. Acts 4:32–35 says, “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any

of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ... God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.”

The first Christians formed the office of deacon to make sure these poor funds were distributed in an equitable way (6:1–7). Luke describes Dorcas as “always doing good and helping the poor” (9:36). The Antioch church sent famine relief to the Jerusalem church through Barnabas and Saul (11:27–30).

Some argue that these examples show that the church's compassion ministries extend only to poor believers. They think that the church should evangelize outsiders and care for insiders. There is some truth to this. So I ask: Do you teach financial stewardship to your church members so their tithes and offerings include benevolence funds for poor members, along the lines of Acts 4:34,35? Does your church have a deacon ministry that ministers to poor members of your church in a systematic, organized way, along the lines of Acts 6:1–7? Does your church contribute to compassion ministries that bring relief to poor Assemblies of God brothers and sisters nationally and internationally, along the lines of Acts 11:27–30? If not, why not?

I want to challenge the idea that we must limit our compassion ministries to those inside the church. When Jesus preached in His hometown synagogue, He detected a doubting tone in His audience's response to Him. So He reminded them, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown,” and He cited the examples of Elijah's ministry to the widow in Zarephath and Elisha's ministry to Naaman to prove His point (Luke 4:24–27). Just as the prophets ministered to “outsiders” by healing them and providing their socioeconomic needs, so — Jesus seems to imply — will He. Similarly, Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37) to help an “insider” understand that loving one's neighbor transcends distinctions between “insiders” (Jews) and “outsiders” (Samaritans).

Finally, Jesus commanded His disciples: “love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get

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*“I do love my neighbor as myself. I'm single and I live in the mountains.”*



anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because *he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked*. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (6:35,36, emphasis added). Jesus linked financial generosity toward those in need, enemies — the ultimate "outsiders," with God's kindness and mercy. These passages question the notion that we should minister compassionately only toward "insiders." Instead, they exemplify what Paul said in Galatians 6:10: "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Just as Jesus proclaimed and performed the Kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit, so too the New Testament church proclaimed the King and performed "signs and wonders" and good works in the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as He ministered to humanity's spiritual, physical, and socioeconomic need, so did they. And so should we.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

The Assemblies of God practices compassion for several pragmatic reasons. It opens doors into the community for evangelism and discipleship, both nationally and internationally. In the late 80s and early 90s, my cousin, David Plymire, and I returned to the area of northwest China where our parents had been missionaries. We raised money to outfit a regional hospital with up-to-date medical equipment, and we included the local pastors in our presentation of the gifts. These gifts resulted in the government treating the churches favorably and also refuted

the longtime Communist lie that Christians do not care about the physical and material needs of people. Today, Assemblies of God missionaries serve in approximately 80 countries as leaders of compassion ministries. Those compassion ministries open doors for the gospel in countries that do not allow traditional evangelistic ministries.

But there is a principled reason, too. We practice compassion because a compassionate Christ demands a compassionate church. Evangelism has a priority to it that healing and help for the poor do not. We do no favors to people if we fill their bellies but don't save their souls. But we never have to choose between evangelism and healing or evangelism and compassion. The Spirit of Jesus Christ empowers us to do them all. That kind of empowered ministry — for evangelism, worship, discipleship, and compassion — is our reason for being. ☺

## NOTES

1. Compassion means "care for the poor and needy of the world" and "meeting human need" (Statement of Fundamental Truths, Articles 10, "The Church and Its Mission" and Article 11, "The Ministry") [http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement\\_of\\_Fundamental\\_Truths/sft\\_short.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_short.cfm).
2. As a Council, ... we commit ourselves and the Movement to Him for the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen." Minutes of the November 1914 General Council.
3. Statement of Fundamental Truths, Article 12, "Divine Healing" [http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement\\_of\\_Fundamental\\_Truths/sft\\_short.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_short.cfm).
4. Influence Resources has two excellent resources that can help your church develop a compassion ministry that complements your evangelistic ministry: Scott Wilson, *Act Normal: Moving Compassion from Niche to Norm*, and Tommy Sparger, *The Impact Effect: A Revolutionary Vision for Compassion in Your Community and the World*. Order these resources from <http://gospelpublishing.com/store/index.cfm>.



*Just as Jesus ministered to humanity's spiritual, physical, and socioeconomic need, so too did the New Testament church. And so should we.*



**GEORGE O. WOOD, D.Th.P.**, general superintendent of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri



**GEORGE PAUL WOOD**, executive editor of *Enrichment* journal, and director of Ministerial Resourcing, Springfield, Missouri



COMPASSION MINISTRY:  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# HAND OUT OR HAND UP?: *Empowering the Poor*

► BY AMY L. SHERMAN

It is time to move from reactive, commodity-based benevolence to the kinds of relational, holistic strategies that can truly bless our neighbors.

**T**he Bible often speaks about the Christian's duty to assist the poor and avoid harming them. Many churches take these Scriptures seriously and have established programs to help the poor. Some churches, however, may unintentionally be hurting the poor through initiatives intended to help them.

Consider a typical program in many congregations: the deacons' benevolence fund. A person in financial straits calls the church asking for help. The secretary informs the deacons. These deacons then attempt to discern the suppliant's need. Is the story true? Is the request genuine? Will it be good stewardship to offer money? Or should they earmark the money for a different person with a different story?

To navigate these situations, the deacons

may have established guidelines. Perhaps they have set a limit on the amount of money they will give to any one family. Maybe they will not assist the same family 2 months in a row, or they will restrict the use of funds (e.g., pay for rent, but not car repairs). One church might couple financial aid with a home visit. Another may ask for proof of need, such as an electricity cutoff notice from the utility company.

While such guidelines can be useful, this approach to community ministry may not be



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*Much church-based community ministry ends up merely helping poor people manage their poverty rather than escape it.*

the best way to handle these needs. Occasionally it may do some good, but more often it applies a short-term, relief-oriented, material solution to a problem that requires a longer-term, more developmentally oriented, more relational, and holistic strategy. It may help at the level of a Band-Aid, but not truly fix the situation. Worse, it may simply enable dysfunction or irresponsibility.

Meanwhile, this reactive approach to community ministry is usually stressful for the deacons. They must act with limited information, leading to ambiguity over the wisdom of their decisions. They feel guilty or uncharitable saying no, yet may be unconvinced that saying yes is good stewardship of limited resources. Moreover, the interaction with the supplicant is by nature transactional, thus making any meaningful spiritual conversation nearly impossible.

Thankfully, better ways of serving the poor in our communities do exist. These are not easy to implement, but they are plausible and possible for any congregation of any size or setting.

#### **Diagnosis Shapes Prescription**

More effective ministry among the needy begins with understanding the Bible's definition of poverty. God's original intention for the world was for peace in four fundamental relationships: relationship with God, self, others, and the created order. The Hebrew

word *shalom* captures this idyllic state. Tragically, the Fall broke all four relationships. This is the root cause of persistent poverty.

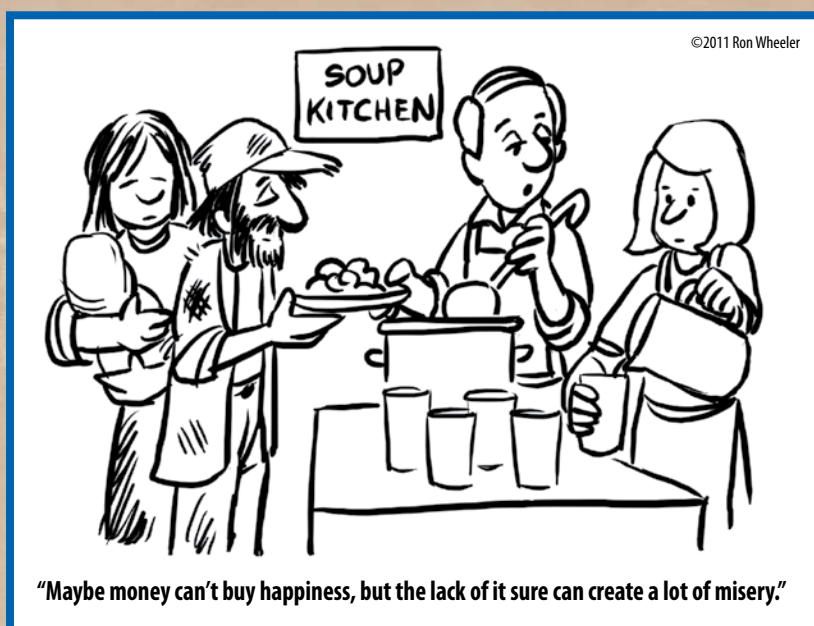
The four foundational relationships are the building blocks for healthy life. When they are functioning properly, people are able to fulfill God's intentions for them by working and supporting their families with the fruits of their labor.

Poverty results from many factors: everything from disability or famine (broken relationship with Creation), to discrimination or injustice (broken relationship with others), to unwise choices or addictions (broken relationship with self or others), to false belief systems (broken relationship with God). Personal sins (e.g., laziness) might contribute, as can structural/systemic sins (e.g., greed that cuts people off from economic opportunities).

Poverty, as Christian scholar Bryant Myers put it, is "the absence of *shalom* in all its meanings." In the biblical worldview, poverty has spiritual, psychological, social, and physical dimensions. (For a detailed discussion of this, see, *When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett, Moody, 2009.) Understanding this biblical definition is critical for our poverty-fighting efforts for at least two reasons.

First, it aids us in diagnosis — which results in better prescriptions. If we understand poverty as merely material, then we will respond with a material solution. We will give money, food, or other commodities. To the extent poverty is present in any of its other forms, we will have missed the mark. We might end up paying rent for a person whose deeper need is for job training. We will supply groceries to a woman whose real need is rescue from domestic violence. Cash assistance to the homeless man may simply enable his further drug use; he needs spiritual and physical healing. Inaccurate diagnosis means ineffective prescriptions.

Second, when we realize the Bible sees poverty as a far broader concept than only material poverty, we who are not materially poor become appropriately humbled. We are able to eschew the subtle, semiconscious feelings of superiority over the poor we often possess. We begin to recognize that although our bank balances may be in good order, our



*"Maybe money can't buy happiness, but the lack of it sure can create a lot of misery."*



spiritual, emotional, or relational lives have flaws. We are, in our own ways, poor — even though we can meet all our material needs. This recognition begins to lower the wall between them and us and can help us avoid patronizing the (materially) poor.

### From Commodities to Relationships

Acting from a material definition of poverty, much church-based community ministry ends up merely helping poor people manage their poverty rather than escape it. Our aid provides merely stopgap solutions, such as money to pay the rent this month. But will circumstances change sufficiently so the family will make next month's rent? We will not know without deeper exploration of the facts. We need to understand the underlying causes for the current emergency situation — which may in fact be a chronic condition. This requires a more relational and holistic approach.

One single mom might be short on rent despite working two jobs and being an excellent budgeter. Perhaps her problem is a landlord that refuses to make needed repairs to her apartment and these have spiked her utility bill. Here, the church's most effective response might go beyond financial aid to include legal representation, repair work, and assistance in finding an alternative living situation.

Another single mom might be working, but her no-good, live-in boyfriend takes her paychecks and spends her money on alcohol, leaving her chronically short. Providing money in this situation may exacerbate it. Instead, counseling, emotional support, prayer, and real friendship with this woman to give her the courage to kick the man out offers long-term hope.

A third supplicant may be an immigrant who is chronically short on rent because his low-paying job simply is inadequate for meeting his housing costs. He needs a better job — and the English skills to acquire one. Here again, a one-time rent payment is not going to solve much. The man would be far better aided if the church rallied around him with language tutoring, skills training, and help finding higher-paying employment.

The rub here, of course, is that it is far easier to *help* the poor than to get to really *know* them. The hard truth is that most church-based community ministry focuses

on commodities — giving people food, clothing, and money — rather than relationships, because the former approach is easier, safer, less messy, and less demanding of time and emotional energy.

Additionally, we sometimes lean toward the commodity-based approach because we have a misguided definition of success. Sometimes leaders want to be able to report to the congregation that they helped a large number of community families through the church's mercy ministry. In reality, of the 50 families they helped in a year, it is likely very few enjoyed any lasting benefit from the church's benevolence. And how many families have been meaningfully enfolded into the congregation. It would have been far more strategic for the benevolence efforts to be expended in a holistic manner through intensive work with just two families. But 50 is a more impressive sounding number than two. Somehow, we need to learn to resist that bigger-is-better mentality. And we need to commit to ensuring that our *benevolence* (disposition to do good) ends up being *beneficent* (producing actual good).

### Practical Ideas for Making the Transition

Moving from commodity-based benevolence to relational, holistic ministry is a process. Some churches start by taking small steps to add new elements to existing relief-oriented ministries to make them more relational. For example, a Cambridge, Massachusetts, church redesigned its semimonthly food and clothing ministry to encourage more conversation with clients. When the food bank is open on Saturday mornings, church volunteers run a short Breakfast Bible Club on-site. Moms visiting the center often have kids in tow. While the children spend 20 minutes enjoying a light breakfast, Bible lesson, and craft, food bank workers engage the moms in conversation over a cup of high-quality coffee. This affords opportunity to pray with clients and to gain deeper insights into their circumstances.

A congregation in the southwestern U.S. enhanced its food pantry with a new community garden. The garden not only produces fresh vegetables for the food bank, it also offers an opportunity to invite clients to work their own plots. This provides opportunities to develop relationships with the gardeners



*In the biblical worldview, poverty has spiritual, psychological, social, and physical dimensions.*



*The Bible sees poverty as a far broader concept than only material poverty.*

while enabling those families to supplement their tight budgets with homegrown produce.

#### **New focus**

Hundreds of churches around the country have recast their traditional benevolence programs into a model called New Focus. In this initiative, church volunteers run a weekly evening supper and teaching program. The church invites supplicants calling the church for financial aid to enroll in the New Focus program. Through it they attend the weekly meeting with their children. They enjoy a free supper. Afterward, the kids attend a Bible club while the parents receive teaching on budgeting. Parents, working with trained budget counselors from the church, set their own goals for making small steps to change habits that can increase their savings and decrease their expenses. The church uses benevolence funds to provide practical rewards (e.g., grocery store gift cards, family-sized

boxes of laundry detergent) for those meeting their goals each week.

The church then invites participants who complete the first several weeks of the budgeting course to join a Friendship Circle — adults from the congregation who gather to support one another in prayer, fellowship, and mutual service. The Friendship Circle does not focus on helping only the New Focus member. Instead, in any given week, the New Focus member might receive aid, or be a contributor to another's need, such as pitching in to paint a fellow Circle member's kitchen. This gives legitimacy to the idea of the Circle being about *mutual* aid, and protects the dignity of the New Focus members by treating them not as objects of charity but as subjects who have their own gifts to offer to serve others.

The program has proven remarkably effective. As a New Focus coordinator in Minnesota reports: "We teach people to live below their means, because the [New Focus]



**1. Structured mentoring programs tend to be more successful than unstructured programs.** Mentoring relationships that are nebulous and unfocused can cause unease for both the mentors and mentees because neither knows what they are supposed to be doing together. A structured relationship: (a) builds in greater accountability; (b)

indicates that the mentee is serious about gaining independence from welfare and will be more highly motivated to mentor; (c) provides definition to the mentor-mentee relationship — i.e., a directed, purposeful friendship aiming toward specific goals; (d) is more volunteer-friendly because the mentor is less likely to be overwhelmed by feeling he

has to do everything for the mentee; and (e) gives the relationship something concrete around which to form and grow, especially in the awkward initial stage.

**2. Accurate diagnosis is critical.** What are the root causes of the recipient's financial challenges? Mentees who cannot manage money well will continue to face difficulties even if the mentoring program helps them find better paying employment. Similarly, job placement will not help people who lack the basic job readiness necessary for retaining employment. A program that offers terrific personal support and counseling but neglects basic obstacles like day care and transportation may also prove insufficient. Effective programs make an accurate diagnosis of the principal reasons why a family is in need and then tailors assistance accordingly.

**3. Mentors and mentees need to sign a covenant at the beginning of their working relationship.** The covenant outlines the commitment each is making to the other and clearly defines the roles and expectations of each. The mentees need to understand what they can, and cannot, ask of the mentors. The mentors need to know what they are committing themselves to do, and then be faithful to do it. Clearly spell out what role, if any, financial benevolence will play in the mentoring program.

**4. A personal action plan will help guide the mentoring process.** An action plan is a strategy document designed by the mentees and their mentors that outlines goals and steps for accomplishing those goals. The action plan includes a timeline and deadlines for accomplishing various goals. Regular, structured,



program's typical client is someone in survival mode whose finances and credit status are totally out of control. We are not in the business of paying your rent and saying good luck. We measure success objectively by people's debt reductions, and subjectively by weekly self-assessments over 18 weeks. Through a group of 12 community churches over 5 years, more than 100 families, totaling 276 individuals, have been impacted."

The New Focus model requires significant effort and manpower, and may be beyond the capacity of congregations with fewer than 150 members (though small congregations could join with other churches to run a joint New Focus initiative). But churches of any size can serve the poor in their communities more effectively by moving from commodities to relationships. The key lies in redirecting the stewardship of the church's financial and human capital. (See sidebar, "Mentoring: Ten Best Practices.")

#### English as a second language

If the church has an established community benevolence fund, it can redirect that money in a number of ways. For example, the church could use their resources to underwrite some kind of modest outreach program that simultaneously offers practical teaching to community members while affording a platform for building relationships with program participants. A once-a-week evening English as a second language class is a good example.

Step one involves establishing a small leadership committee to oversee the program. To recruit participants, committee members can make contacts at schools and libraries to alert them to the new program. They can also post fliers at food banks, thrift stores, and temporary agencies that deploy day laborers. If no one at the church has the skills or experience to serve as teacher, the committee can turn to community agencies. The church can recruit potential instructors through contacts with

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face-to-face contact is essential to maintaining the action plan.

**5. Effective mentoring almost always involves time-intensive, personalized help.** Be straightforward with volunteers that this ministry is going to take time. Utilize mentor teams rather than a one-on-one model. This precludes volunteer burnout and allows mentors to work in pairs. Put someone who has daytime availability — such as a homemaker, a retired person, or a self-employed person with a flexible schedule — on every mentor team. Typically mentoring will involve helping the mentee with personal business matters — such as dealing with the IRS, DMV, or other governmental agencies — that can only be attended during weekday business hours.

**6. Mentors must be willing to pry a little, and mentees must**

**be willing to build a transparent relationship with their mentors.** This is one of the most difficult parts of the mentoring relationship. But asking tough questions, holding people accountable, and getting the participant to talk straight are all necessary. Tough love is often necessary.

**7. A 6-month minimum relationship is needed.** The first 30 to 90 days are typically spent in a crisis management phase, focusing on the participant's most immediate obstacles to self-sufficiency (e.g., finding day care, clearing up back bills, reestablishing telephone service, obtaining car repairs, etc.). As friendship with the volunteers grows deeper, the participants tend to open up more. This may mean that the mentor team may not even learn of some significant problems until 4 to 5 months into the relationship.

**8. Preexit interviews can help guide participants in making the transition out of the mentoring program.** At these sessions, about 2 months before the end of the formal program, mentors and mentees review the progress they have made together and assess what remains to be done to help meet the goals identified in the action plan. This can help focus the remaining time. It can also encourage mentors to stay involved with the participant beyond the formal program if they see there remains more they can do to assist the participant.

**9. Make sure the sponsoring entity carries an insurance policy that provides liability protection for volunteer mentors, including coverage for an at-fault car accident involving the volunteer's automobile.** This will increase the volunteers' comfort level in providing

transportation help to mentees.

**10. Intentionally support mentors.** The church must train, encourage, pray for, and appreciate mentors. Training needs to cover, at a minimum: relating cross-culturally; developing active listening, goal-setting, and problem-solving skills; assessing the program participant's needs and assets; learning how to set appropriate boundaries; understanding typical participant problems; and learning how to present one's faith winsomely and appropriately. It may be helpful to facilitate gatherings of volunteer teams to swap stories, compare experiences, problem-solve, and pray for each other.

— Adapted from Amy Sherman, "Top Ten Lessons Learned in Welfare-to-Work Mentoring Ministries," *The ABCs of Community Ministry: A Curriculum for Congregations* (Hudson Institute, 2001), 82–84.



*In the absence of a structure, real relationships between congregants and needy families in the community rarely happen.*

the United Way office, a nonprofit serving immigrants/refugees, a community college, or the county cooperative extension office. (A national directory of cooperative extension offices is accessible online at [www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/).)

Once a program is running, ESL teachers and tutors will start getting to know the participants. After some weeks, program leaders can make announcements about additional ways the church would like to welcome its students. The church can invite ESL participants to church services or picnics. They can also inform ESL participants about other activities at the church, such as marriage or parenting seminars or Vacation Bible School. If such activities cost money, the church can offer scholarships for ESL members to attend.

Consider setting aside a portion of benevolence funds to address an ESL participant's financial needs. The church would not need to advertise this; but, if an ESL student shared a particular need with his tutor, the tutor could inform church leaders. Benevolence monies subsequently invested will have a greater likelihood of accomplishing good, since the ESL participant is in ongoing contact with church members.

Congregations can even set up this kind of aid as a no-interest loan the participant repays over a period of time, to make funds available for another family in need. Friends of mine with experience in ministering among Hispanic families note that this is often a successful approach, since the recipients want a hand up more than a hand out.

Programs like ESL make possible the cultivation of genuine relationships with the participants. At a Park Cities, Texas, congregation, ESL teacher Jessica Young reports that students eager to practice their English skills are attending Bible studies at the church. In addition, she has gone into students' homes to provide extra tutoring. This has deepened her friendships. During one home visit she was able to pray with a distraught student whose son had been told he would need to repeat 2nd grade.

### **Jobs for life**

Jobs for Life is a church-based outreach to unemployed individuals in the community. Like an ESL program, it creates a platform for offering practical teaching (in this case,

biblically based life skills coupled with soft job skills) and genuine relationships. This ministry offers classes twice weekly for 12 weeks, using a preset curriculum from the national Jobs for Life headquarters ([www.JobsforLife.org](http://www.JobsforLife.org)). Nearly 200 congregations and Christian nonprofits nationwide have implemented Jobs for Life. The biblically based curriculum and relationships between participants and mentors have led to significant numbers of conversions. The ministry also has a solid track record of good results in helping graduates find and keep jobs. A single congregation can operate the program, though often churches collaborate together. Sometimes this involves unique partnerships between urban and suburban congregations, each of which brings strengths to the table.

### **Individual development accounts**

Another possibility for creative redirection of the church's mercy funds involves setting up an Individual Development Accounts ministry. An IDA is a matched savings account. A church can establish a modest program, inviting a handful or more adults into a financial literacy program. Participants set aside a small amount of money each week, and the church matches that amount (1-to-1, 2-to-1, or at whatever ratio the program leaders determine). Typically, program participants must agree to stay involved for a specified length of time (e.g., 12 to 24 months), and they can only use their savings for restricted purposes, such as a down payment on a home or seed capital for a new small business venture. The Chalmers Center for Economic Development is now offering free technical assistance to enable churches of any size to launch new IDA programs. (For more information, visit [www.chalmers.org/ida\\_pgm/ida.php](http://www.chalmers.org/ida_pgm/ida.php)).

### **The Importance of Structure**

Some readers may feel uncomfortable with how often the word *program* has appeared thus far. As believers, we rightly have an inclination to want to be about people, not about programs. But in the absence of a structure, real relationships between congregants and needy families in the community rarely happen. The sad truth: Many in our communities are fairly segregated by race or class — or both. Many church members do not naturally cross



paths with low-income residents. Preachers talk about congregants going out and loving their neighbors in need, but few congregants know how to jumpstart such a relationship.

The programs noted above offer an avenue for connecting congregants and community members in a *directed* relationship. The ultimate goal is to befriend the poor. But if we simply enjoin congregants to do that, they get stymied. They wonder, *How do I start a relationship with a poor person? And once I'm in it, what am I supposed to do?* We would not need programs if church members were naturally befriending the people in the community who are outside the church and struggling in poverty. Usually, though, such friendships are *not* naturally occurring.

ESL, Jobs for Life, and IDA ministries are practical solutions to this dilemma. They offer people in need help that truly helps. They attract participants who want to improve their situations. Program volunteers begin their relationship with participants through defined roles: teach this class, tutor this student, attend these meetings, cheerlead this participant. This affords them time to get acquainted with participants. And as time passes, a less structured and more natural relationship grows. Volunteers and participants discover they are not as different from one another as they might initially have thought.

Volunteers who enter the ministry thinking they are there to give discover, in fact, they are receiving much. Meanwhile, program participants receive friendly emotional and spiritual support as they work hard to acquire new skills that can set them on a more stable path.

### Vocational Stewardship

Finally, in considering how to strengthen the effectiveness of their community outreach, church leaders should not only reconsider how to best steward the congregation's financial resources. They also need to be more

strategic about deploying the *vocational* talents of their members. A congregation with many blue-collar tradesmen, for example, might consider launching a car or home repair ministry. One with numerous educators could consider reaching out to low-income students from a nearby elementary school.

Or, imagine a large congregation with numerous professionals in the pews. Let's compare two possible strategies for serving its city. First, the church can partner with the local homeless shelter in providing the manpower to provide dinner once a month. Alternatively, it can encourage launching vocationally based small groups with the mandate to brainstorm how they can deploy their particular vocational skills and networks to help address poverty locally.

In the first instance, the church treats its bankers, doctors, accountants, lawyers, and business owners generically — as bodies that can ladle soup. In the latter approach, the church challenges these same congregants to think creatively about how to use the unique gifts God has given them to bring a greater taste of *shalom* to the community.

Bankers might brainstorm on how to create a workable alternative to predatory payday lenders. Lawyers might start a small legal-aid clinic. Accountants can offer to file tax returns for free for the working poor. Doctors can commit to taking on, pro bono, five patients who lack health insurance. Businessmen can agree to mentor promising entrepreneurs from the inner city.

Lest you wonder if these are pipe dreams, they are not. Churches in Pittsburgh, Raleigh, Asheville, and Atlanta are doing exactly these things.

We can do better than we have in serving the poor in our communities. It is time to move from reactive, commodity-based benevolence to the kinds of relational, holistic strategies that can truly bless our neighbors. ☺

*Volunteers who enter the ministry thinking they are there to give discover, in fact, they are receiving much.*



**AMY L. SHERMAN, Ph.D.**, director of the Sagamore Institute's Center on Faith in Communities, has been working for over 15 years to help churches strengthen their community ministries. Her newest book, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*, will be published later this year by InterVarsity Press.

For an example of a church that is having an effective compassion ministry using some of the ideas in this article, visit [www.etchurch.org/inner-city-outreach.php](http://www.etchurch.org/inner-city-outreach.php).



COMPASSION MINISTRY:  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# MOBILIZING FOR COMPASSION:

## *Moving People Into Ministry*

► BY GRANT STANDEFER





Consider these practical helps as you lead your church to be the merciful, compassionate presence of Christ among the poor, broken, suffering, hurting, marginalized, and oppressed of your community.

**T**he Holy Spirit is stirring the hearts of pastors and churches. He is moving them beyond an inward-focused, fortress mentality, toward an internally healthy, externally focused approach. He is moving them toward a missional model (every member a missionary), a biblical approach of the priesthood of all believers, using the gifts He has given them to serve others (1 Peter 2:9; 4:10).

Is the Holy Spirit stirring your heart in these ways?

God was dealing with me along these lines a few years ago when I was pastoring a church in Knoxville, and I was frustrated. I knew the Spirit was calling me to lead my church in compassion ministry, but I had no idea how to do that. A compassion-ministry focus was different from the ministry path my church had taken for years. I was in a quandary how to follow the leading of the Spirit.

Perhaps you are in the same predicament and are asking God, "How do I lead my church to minister in my city in a way that will reflect Your heart of mercy?" Perhaps the following suggestions will provide some practical help as you lead your church to be the merciful, compassionate presence of Christ among the poor, broken, suffering, hurting, marginalized, and oppressed of your community.

### Lead Your Church in Praying for the Poor

Psalm 127:1 reminds us, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." Pastors sensing the move of the Holy Spirit to lead their church in compassion ministry need to wait on the Lord and listen to Him. They should not begin a compassion ministry without God's wisdom, especially if it runs counter to the current and past focus of their church.

Every church wanting to take initial steps into mercy ministry needs to bathe this venture in prayer. In most towns and cities there are numerous places you can engage your church in compassion ministry. Prayerful discernment regarding where you invest your time and resources is essential. Do not

rush off to serve in places where God has not called you, while neglecting or ignoring areas to which He has called you. Jesus said in John 15:5, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

As you pray about being God's merciful presence in your community and ask Him for direction, He will reveal places He wants you to serve. God-orchestrated meetings with people you do not know will lead to opportunities for service. Pray, keep your spiritual antennae up, and follow God's leading.

### Teach What Scripture Has To Say About God's Heart for the Poor

Part of training people in compassion ministry is helping them see God's heart for the poor. In beginning an emphasis on compassion, immerse yourself and the members of your church in the wealth of passages that speak of the compassionate heart of God. Since the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), it stirs us to action when we read passages like Jeremiah 22:16, "He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord." We are convicted when we read Ezekiel 16:49, "'Now this was the sin of our sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.' " We are challenged when we look at the life and ministry of Jesus and see Him in the synagogue at Nazareth reading from the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom



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*Connect people with an opportunity for service that utilizes their spiritual gifts, a calling on their life, something they are passionate about, or an area their life experiences has shaped.*



for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor' " (Luke 4:16–21).

Some members of your congregation may have preconceived ideas about the poor. God may need to change their attitudes concerning why people are poor. Let God's Word speak to their hearts.

Ways to begin this aspect of training include preaching a sermon series on what Scripture says about ministering to the poor. You can also supplement a sermon series on God's heart for the poor with complementary studies and discussions in Bible classes and small groups. Amy Sherman in *Sharing God's Heart for the Poor* says there are over 400 Scripture passages that refer to God's heart for the poor. Another book we use is Timothy Keller's *Ministries of Mercy*. Think about these passages, read them, and teach your church about the compassionate heart of God.

Several training programs are also available online that can help you develop a 1-day seminar, a seminar with several weekly sessions, or ongoing training on compassion ministry. (For a list of these training materials, see the "Compassion Ministry Resources" sidebar on page 45.)

### **Investigate Opportunities in Your Community**

You may have some individuals in your church who want to minister to those who are poor, but do not know where or how to go about it. Part of training your people in compassion ministry is letting them know about opportunities for serving.

I knew about the needs and concerns of the members of my church, but I knew virtually nothing about the larger context in which I lived and ministered. Any church desiring to move into compassion ministry must know what is going on where they live.

Enlist members of your church who have expressed an interest in greater community involvement to research your community. You might designate them as your Compassion Team. They can report their discoveries to you and to the church.

When researching your city, it is critical to look at both its strengths and weaknesses. God is gracious and faithful and has never abandoned even the darkest and most broken places of our communities. You will

discover people and ministries that your church can come alongside and support what God is already doing. Ask what strengths and assets God has in place. Inquire about existing needs and problems that diminish God's intended purpose for your city. This task will add fuel to your fire because you will be able to pray over both the needs and assets, asking God to show you where you should be connecting as a church.

You can learn a great deal about your community by checking census data at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Other sources of information are: government Community Action Committee or other social service agencies. In Knoxville, the U.S. Department of Children's Services compiles an extensive list of community resources. Your United Way may have done research. Other ministries, like Compassion Coalition, have extensive research they will make available to churches. We serve Knox County, Tennessee, specifically, but you might glean some ideas for your community by going to [www.compassioncoalition.org](http://www.compassioncoalition.org).

Enlist help from church members and interview people in your community. You may wish to interview government officials, elected leaders, directors of nonprofits and ministries, law enforcement officers, and people who have lived in your area for many years.

### **Help Your Church Members Discover Their Spiritual Gifts**

A pastor asked me to help move his church into compassion ministry. The church had placed a heavy emphasis on spiritual gifts inventories and he had hundreds on file. He also said he had 70 to 80 people who indicated they had the gift of mercy, but the church was doing little in the community. He was concerned because he knew they were sitting in their seats every Sunday, frustrated because the church was not utilizing their gifts.

We developed a plan in which he would find out where their specific interests and passions lie. I encouraged him to find out which of his members were social workers, served on the staff of nonprofits, or had a history of volunteering.

Start with the people in your church who are already passionate about serving the community, especially those who are already serving. Determine their spiritual gifts.

Utilizing spiritual gifts inventories is one way to help members ascertain where God wants them to serve. Pastors can also have their Compassion Team conduct interviews with church members, exploring areas where they have an existing passion, or perhaps life experiences that God may want to use to serve others going through the same experience.

Since you and your church have already done some study of both the needs and resources in your town, it becomes a matter of connecting members of your church with places that might be possibilities for service. Connect them with an opportunity for service that utilizes their spiritual gifts, a calling on their life, something they are passionate about, or an area their life experiences has shaped. For example, someone that has experienced grief may have a desire to start a grief support group.

### Gradually Introduce the Members of Your Church to Needs and Resources in Your Community

When pastors ask members of their church to serve people they have never seen or to minister in places they have never been, the response is generally minimal. How can you overcome this barrier to service?

One church provides an example of how it connected its members with places to serve. This church utilized a progressive tour and conducted it in three stages. You can do this in conjunction with a training seminar.

First, the pastor and Compassion Team took participants in the church bus or van on a tour of local ministries, nonprofits, and agencies that work with the poor. The team discovered these sites while studying the needs and assets of the community. In your community it may be a youth center that works with inner-city at-risk young people, or a homeless shelter, or governmental agency.

The prayer principle is important here. Ask God for guidance in selecting the places on your tour, then drive by the locations, telling those on the tour what happens at each place. Tell them about the people you have met who are working in the trenches and perhaps some stories of personal transformation that happened because of the work these organizations are doing. On the first tour simply drive by the locations and talk about them. This is a nonthreatening way to introduce members to serving possibilities.

Later, schedule another tour. This time stop at some of the places, meet people who



*Examine where your church has been and the steps you will need to take to move your church into compassion ministry.*



## COMPASSION COALITION WEBSITE

**Compassion Coalition has been working in Knoxville, Tennessee, since 2000** to mobilize churches for mercy ministry. The passion to assist churches in moving beyond the walls of our places of worship to be the compassionate presence of Christ in our community led us to establish a new website, [www.compassion-coalition.org](http://www.compassion-coalition.org), to share what we have

learned. Churches can use this website as a guide to help them serve others. The resources link on our homepage provides resources to help you mobilize and equip your church to lead a transformational impact in your community. Some of the areas include:

- **Teaching** — Teaching is an important step in developing a compassion ministry. Our website has material on why we need to engage in community ministry, biblical principles for community

ministry, and recommended Bible study resources.

- **Training** — Understanding poverty is important if churches are to make a difference among the poor. Under the resources link read "What Is Poverty?" by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert of The Chalmers Institute for Economic Development at Covenant College.
- **Prayer** — It is essential for pastors and churches that are serious about following God's call in compassion ministry to bathe their process in prayer. The website has a prayer walk guide for churches.
- **Getting Started** — Churches often do not know where to begin. *The Ministry Inventory Guide* has a process to assess your church's ministry capacity and identity. When churches ask, "How can we get involved and make a difference?" the "Onramps to Ministry" and "Preparing the Church for Salt and Light Ministry" links provide practical answers.
- **Volunteers** — Compassion fatigue is real for those who consistently give of themselves. The website also has help for churches with a "Volunteer Management Tips" link.

The heart of Compassion Coalition is to be the servant of the church. Our mission is to inform and equip churches to be the body of Christ in their communities.





*Christians have far too often, with the best of intentions, charged off unprepared to love and serve, subsequently doing more harm than good.*

are serving in those locations, get a brief tour, and hear more stories of transformed lives.

After the first two tours, arrange another tour that will include service opportunities. These opportunities will not be long-term commitments, but will be one-time service events where church members get their feet wet. Often in these short-term service contexts the Spirit of God captures hearts that lead to a long-term commitment with a ministry or agency.

We had one church participate in a Serve Day. One of their responsibilities was to provide some painting in the Cerebral Palsy Center. Those who worked at the center that day were so captivated by the residents and the employees that the church now has a weekly presence there. Prior to the 1-day service opportunity, they did not even know the center existed. A proverb says, "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I'll understand."

A highly effective tool is personal testimonies that introduce church members to mercy ministry possibilities. Find members of your church who have a history of volunteering and have them tell how God uses them, how lives are changed, and how God is glorified. Personal stories will touch hearts, motivate others to follow the example set, and minimize fear. Some of your members will say, "If she can do something like that, by God's grace so can I."

#### **Important Considerations as You Begin**

Part of training your congregation in compassion ministries is helping them understand their motives for serving and some of the difficult aspects of compassion ministry.

As God leads you and your church to move into your community in compassionate service, consider:

**It's not about you.** I hear people exhorting others to get involved in serving by saying, "I got so much more out of it than I gave. I went to serve, but I was the one who was blessed." The motivation for serving becomes about me.

Others go into compassion ministry expecting expressions of gratitude and appreciation by those being served. We do not act in merciful ways to find fulfillment or receive thanks. We do it because the Christ in us calls us to do so. And, truth is, "Mercy is messy." There are rewards, and there is often gratitude, but more often compassion ministry is about being a servant when no one notices or cares. It is about tenacity and perseverance. It is about getting dirty and sometimes even getting hurt. There is heartache, disappointment, pain, and delayed gratification from seeds you have planted and watered but may not bear fruit for years, and sometimes never. This is why it is important to teach your people about compassion fatigue so they do not become overwhelmed while doing good. We must never forget that Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist and washed the feet of Judas prior to being betrayed by him.

**Count the cost.** Jesus tells us to count the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25-35). Churches need to realize that this ministry will shake things up. Programming and schedules in many churches are so overloaded that many members are exhausted and cannot think about adding anything else to their plate. Churches moving into

#### **Pontius' Puddle**

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compassion ministry need to examine the things they ask of their members, and determine how many activities contribute to their mission of being the merciful presence of Christ in their community. Churches may need to eliminate some programs.

Churches must also realize there may be those coming to their building that may not look, dress, or smell like them. Churches need to come to grips with the reality that buildings being used for mercy ministry are not always pristine.

**Do no harm.** Christians have far too often, with the best of hearts and intentions, charged off unprepared to love and serve, subsequently doing more harm than good. I recommend that churches moving into compassion ministry study Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett's book *When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting Others ... and Yourself*. Other books, such as Ruby Payne's *Bridges Out of Poverty* are also beneficial. Read in this area before making some of the mistakes others have already made.

I encourage churches to come alongside existing ministries in their communities rather than recreating the wheel. God raised up those ministries in your town. They have learned valuable lessons through experience. They are, more often than not, in desperate need of volunteers and financial resources. Such partnerships can be an incredible blessing to both the church and the ministry with which they prayerfully choose to walk.

## Conclusion

We are called to move beyond the walls of our church buildings and into our communities to serve because we are Christ's body, Christ's physical presence in the world (1 Corinthians 12:27). Whatever He did is what we will be doing, because it is Christ who lives in us (Colossians 1:27). He moved among the poor, the lepers, the hungry, the broken, the oppressed, and the outcasts. He

loved them, touched them, and healed them. He also taught them. The Christ in us calls us to do the same. This is following Jesus. It is not just deed. It is not just word. It is word *and* deed. Both go hand in hand.

In our increasingly secular and unchurched culture a huge chasm exists between the believing and the unbelieving. The unbelieving community no longer listens to what the church has to say as we shout across the canyon. We have lost credibility. We have lost trust. Through acts of lovingkindness, mercy, compassion, and service, however, we earn the right to be heard. Paraphrasing the words of Eric Swanson and Rick Russaw in *The Externally Focused Church*, loving acts of service and compassion are the bridge over which the words of the gospel can walk. ☺



**GRANT STANDERFER**, executive director of Compassion Coalition, Knoxville, Tennessee. You can contact him at [grant@compassioncoalition.org](mailto:grant@compassioncoalition.org). Compassion Coalition website is [www.compassioncoalition.org](http://www.compassioncoalition.org).

## COMPASSION MINISTRY RESOURCES

**Faith in Action Campaign** / Bible Study (Zondervan / World Vision / Outreach) [putyourfaithinaction.org/](http://putyourfaithinaction.org/). Accessed April 21, 2011.

**Guide Our Steps** (Tearfund International Learning Zone) [tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/Guide+our+steps/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/Guide+our+steps/). Accessed April 21, 2011.

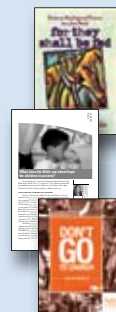
**Kingdom Lifestyle Bible Study Series** (Disciple Nations Alliance) [disciplenations.org/resources/small-group-bible-study](http://disciplenations.org/resources/small-group-bible-study).

Sider, Ronald, ed. 1997. *For They Shall Be Fed: Readings and Prayers for a Just World*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Sider, Ronald, and Heidi Unruh, "What Does the Bible Say About Hope for Children in Poverty?" *Journal of Family and Community Ministries* (Summer 2008) [baylor.edu/fcm\\_journal/index.php?id=56255](http://baylor.edu/fcm_journal/index.php?id=56255). Accessed April 21, 2011.

**Walking Alongside Curriculum, Foundations for Holistic Ministry** (Baylor University Center for Family and Community Ministries). [baylor.edu/social%5Fwork/cfcm/index.php?id=66992](http://baylor.edu/social%5Fwork/cfcm/index.php?id=66992). Accessed April 21, 2011.

**Becoming a Church That Makes a Difference: Ventures in Holistic Ministry** [urbansermons.org/f/becoming-church-makes-difference-ventures-holistic-ministry](http://urbansermons.org/f/becoming-church-makes-difference-ventures-holistic-ministry). Accessed April 21, 2011.



*I encourage churches to come alongside existing ministries in their communities rather than recreating the wheel.*





**COMPASSION MINISTRY:**  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD







Thomas Filibary

# ARE YOU A PARTNER OR COMPETITOR?

A fourfold strategy to build bridges between your church and community.

► BY SCOTT WILSON

**T**hree years ago my ministry staff had lunch at a restaurant near our church. The city mayor was sitting near us. We were ready to leave when the mayor said, "Pastor, could I talk to you for a few minutes?" He said, solemnly, "Pastor Scott, there's a problem ... a big problem."

I responded, "Tell me what it is."

Without hesitating, he said, "You and your church have a bad reputation."

I was stunned. I told him, "Mr. Mayor, I don't understand. Please tell me what you are talking about."

He explained, "You are the biggest church; and, in fact, the biggest organization in our community. But you have a reputation for doing your own thing. You are not really part of our community."

I tried not to be defensive, but I told him how I saw our role in the city. I said, "Everything we do is to help this community. I wake up every morning thinking and praying

about how we can have a positive impact on the city. The church and I will do anything you want us to do for the community. Everything we do is to help people here."

He smiled, knowingly, "That's the problem, Pastor Scott. You are always doing things *for* us, but you do not do much *with* us. There is a difference."

He gave an example. "Do you remember last fall when your church had its fall festival? About 5,000 people attended. It was huge. The city also had a fall festival, but only a handful of people came. When we had our citywide clean-up days, we called your church to see how many of your people could



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participate. The answer we received was that your church has its own clean-up program, so very few people from your church were available to help us."

The mayor stopped for a second to let what he was saying sink in, and then he continued. "Pastor Scott, your church has all the money, all the people, and all the resources to make a huge difference in our city, but the other leaders in the city see your church as inconsiderate, and worse, as competition. Here is what I am saying: You can either *partner with* us or *compete with* us. It's your choice, but your reputation is on the line."

As I walked out of the restaurant, I knew this was not a complaint I could easily dismiss. The mayor had pointed out a profound misunderstanding in our concept of our mission. We saw our role as a bastion of hope where people could come for salvation and comfort. We had designed all our efforts in the community as forays to touch people and bring them into our fellowship.

That afternoon the Holy Spirit reminded me of several things. When the Son of God stepped out of glory onto earth, He came "to dwell among us." His name is Emmanuel, "God with us." He did not remain at a distance and offer resources at arm's length. He became one of us, ate our food, drank our water, endured similar injustice, suffered our disappointments, and saw our hopes.

In passage after passage in the Gospels, Jesus spent time with outcasts: despised prostitutes, hated tax collectors, children, women, the blind, the lame, and foreigners. Jesus did not see us as projects He needed to fix, but real people He needed to love. Too often, people were perceiving the efforts of our church as projects instead of genuine love for flesh-and-blood people.

That afternoon the Spirit also reminded me of the passage that has been the foundation for our church. When Jesus began His ministry, He read His first message from the prophet Isaiah. As He stood in the synagogue, He quoted: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18,19).

Jesus came to inaugurate God's kingdom on earth, a Kingdom that will ultimately redeem those who believe, but even creation itself (Romans 8:18-25). He does not divide the world into sacred and secular. He cares for people where they are and uses us to meet their needs. We never fail to communicate the gospel of transforming grace, but people will receive this message more readily if we also fulfill His mission of caring for "the least of these." In fact, in Isaiah's prophecy, the people who are recipients of God's grace become His partners. The prophet says, "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor" (Isaiah 61:3). This is why we call our church The Oaks Fellowship.

The mayor's words challenged me, inspired me, and redirected the efforts of our church. Our leaders prayed and planned. Within a week, God led us to implement a fourfold strategy to build bridges between our church and our community.

#### **Appoint a Champion To Coordinate Efforts With Community Leaders**

In our community there are five types of organizations that serve as gatekeepers to serve people: government agencies, schools, churches, the Chamber of Commerce, and other nonprofit organizations. Andrea Lathrop is a gifted and compassionate person in our church. We asked her to take the initiative with each of these gatekeepers and to be the church's ambassador and liaison.

Lathrop would introduce herself at gatekeepers' meetings and offer the church's help. She gave her contact information to the heads of the local nonprofit organizations, school principals, teachers, elected officials, business leaders, and pastors. At first, they were not sure that The Oaks wanted to support their efforts.

If the city or county government had an event and needed help to make it happen, Lathrop found out about the need, be it manpower, facilities, or funding, and called the official to offer the church's assistance. In time, the Oaks reputation began to change, and we became known as a trustworthy partner. Of course, we could not provide everything the gatekeepers needed for every event. But Lathrop was dedicated to provide



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as much as our church could offer, and she became a channel to find other resources. When we stopped competing, we realized we could earn their trust, become genuine partners, and make a difference.

### We Redefined the Win

For years The Oaks Fellowship defined success by the strength of its programs and the increase in numbers. Now, we define success by our ability to help the gatekeepers accomplish their goals, whether we get any notice or not. By helping feed the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless, mentor kids, give blood, and dozens of other functions, we are fulfilling God's calling in Isaiah 61 and Luke 4. We want to be like Jesus and serve with no strings attached.

Practically, this redefinition required us to align our calendar. Instead of hosting a competing fall festival, we shut down ours and joined the city's celebration. We had 400 volunteers helping staff the event, and we did not promote our church. Instead of planning and conducting a separate community clean-up campaign, we called the city to find out their plans, and we joined them. When people find out we are selflessly serving this way, they are impressed.

To facilitate the work of the nonprofits in our area, we invited them to a Sunday worship service. A representative from all 38 nonprofits came to the platform with a sign describing the needs they were meeting in the community. I told our congregation, "These organizations and agencies touch the lives of hurting people in our area. This is the body of Christ in action, and we have the privilege to be partners with them." They received a standing ovation. The service ended early so people could visit the booths, learn more about each organization, and sign up as a volunteer.

We offer the city and county the use of our church sign on the highway as a communication tool. On voting days, when school is out due to bad weather, or for any other civic purpose, our sign can communicate their message. When the local food pantry wants to make a big push to restock their shelves, we work with a grocery store that offers \$5 matching donations of food. Similarly, instead of doing our own clothing drive, we now coordinate with two community agencies. This

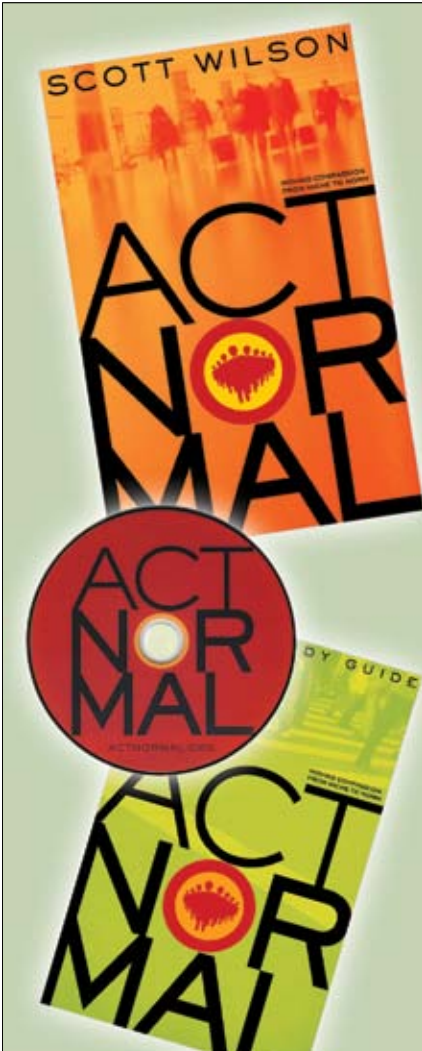
way our people know their clothes are going to specific, targeted needs.

It took a while to earn the trust of the educators and business executives in the area. Many assumed we still had an angle. A principal suspected we were offering to help mentor kids because we wanted to recruit them for the school that meets in our building. Some business leaders thought we would pounce on people with the gospel if we served at their events. Gradually, they realized they could trust us to become true partners.

### Create a Comprehensive-Care Strategy

To find out more about the needs in our area, we developed an effective strategy to partner with the gatekeepers. A consultant met with our staff, board, and lay leaders to see how God used our church in the past to reach the

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**ACT NORMAL**

**"The normal Christian life is a life led and empowered by the Holy Spirit** so believers can accomplish the work God has set before them," states Scott Wilson, author of *Act Normal*. "As believers God has called us to be witnesses to His grace, to be agents of change in the lives of those around us, and to live in such a manner that we represent and honor Jesus Christ, the One who saved us."

*Act Normal* is a 31-day journey through the Book of Acts. Each day's reading introduces readers to what it means to live for God and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through the use of real-life examples, and the ability to express complex concepts in everyday language, Wilson helps readers gain a grasp of the story that runs through Acts, while at the same time providing practical suggestions for living a biblical life that honors God. *Act Normal* provides more than just an introduction to the basics of the Christian faith; it offers solid, biblical content that will help new believers better understand their faith and mature believers grow in their faith.



## HOW TO CHOOSE PARTNERSHIPS

**The heart of the Care Strategy is to create partnerships** between the church and other organizations. There are many nonprofits with great programs and systems in place to meet the needs of others. Our goal is to not reinvent the wheel, but to create relationships to impact our community. Among the agencies we partner with are:

- Big Brother, Big Sister
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Meals on Wheels
- Salvation Army
- Hope Clinic
- Habitat for Humanity
- Angel Food
- Foster Care
- Court Appointed Special Advocates

We have identified several core elements that help us filter our partnerships. Before pursuing a partnership, we ask:

- Does the potential partner's vision, mission, and philosophies align with The Oaks' vision, mission, and philosophies?
- What is the potential impact of this nonprofit?
- Does this opportunity help us bring a message of hope and life transformation in Christ? If not, are we okay with that? [Evangelism opportunities]
- Does this potential partner have a developed leadership structure within their organization? [Organizational leadership]
- Would this partnership utilize the skills of individuals in our church? [Skills alignment]
- Who would lead this partnership — a staff member or lay leader? [Oaks volunteer leadership]
- Would this provide immediate relief or ongoing development to help people gain skills to improve their level of living? [Development versus relief]

We rate each of the above elements on a 1–3 scale, which helps us determine what, if any, level of partnership we would have with an organization. (See Partnership Levels, below.) This process is essential to preventing overcommitting or making false promises to potential partners.

### PARTNERSHIP LEVELS

Once we total the numbers for a potential partnership (based on the core elements, above), we total an overall score. Each organization lands at one of the following levels.

- **Level One Partner** (19–21)  
Financial support, leadership involvement, staff support, facility usage, full media, prayer support, volunteer recruitment from the church.
- **Level Two Partner** (13–18)  
Potential/partial financial support, limited staff support, potential/partial media, volunteer recruitment from church, prayer support.
- **Level Three Partner** (0–12)  
Publication (website, possible Sunday handouts), prayer support.

community. A demographic study was completed, and the results were astounding. We found:

- over 5,000 children are waiting for placement in foster care.
- over 2,000 kids need mentoring through Big Brother, Boys and Girls Clubs, or school programs.
- over 16,000 people live below the poverty line, and 6,000 of them are children.

We discovered there was a compelling need to help children who live around the church. Jesus explained that children are just as valuable to God as adults, but they are more vulnerable and in need of care. They are the hope of the next generation, but their success depends on the nurture they receive today.

Key members of the church received the results of the study. One of our leaders, Aaron Escamilla, was so captured by the need that he became the champion of our Care Strategy. Aaron coordinates every aspect of our care ministry, including ministry to students, children, young adults, adults, and seniors. Every inch of our church is involved in caring for the needy. It is in our DNA.

Care Strategy takes coordination, but it is worth it. Lathrop provides the connection with the gatekeepers to surface the needs. Escamilla puts teams together to tackle the biggest needs, and these teams are resources for the small groups in our church. Groups are encouraged to let God touch their hearts with a particular need, and to make a commitment to meet those needs.

Six couples were meeting for Bible study. Half of them are relatively new believers. While studying the Scriptures one day, one person said, "Learning about God's love for people is really cool, but why don't we put what we are learning into action?" They asked God to lead them.

Each day these couples drive past government housing on their way to work or school. Many of the kids who live there do not have fathers at home. So the couples decided that on Sunday afternoons they would play soccer with the kids and spend holidays with their families. These couples take their kids along to share love and friendship. As these parents care for disadvantaged children, they are modeling grace and love to their own children.

Human trafficking is a tragic problem in every city in the world, but officials predicted that the Super Bowl in Dallas would cause an influx of 10,000 more enslaved young women to the city. We learned that sex trafficking happens each year at the Super Bowl because men fly in from all over the world with money to spend on pleasure of every sort.

One of our small groups contacted two of the four largest agencies dedicated to freeing women from sex slavery and offered the use of our church as a home base for their training efforts during the weeks before the game. These agencies trained 200 people to go into the city of Dallas to look for vulnerable women. We paid for billboards with the pictures of young women who had been abducted and who might be seen on the streets. From 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. volunteers went to clubs, bars, and stood on street corners looking for these women.

One of the agencies, Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution (SOAP), became our partner. Years ago Theresa Flores was abducted into sex slavery. At her darkest moment, all she had was her lingerie, the clothes on her back, and a few bars of soap from area hotels. After she found freedom as a sex slave, she wanted to help other young women trapped in the trade. As she prayed, the Lord led her to ask hotels to put her organization's 800 number on the soap wrappers in their bathrooms. Because young, captive women often do not know where to turn, the phone number may become a gateway to freedom. During the Super Bowl week, our volunteers bought 10,000 bars of soap with the agency's phone number and put them in hotels around the city.

Through the leadership of Lathrop and Escamilla, God has touched the hearts of people in other small groups in our church. He has directed many of them to be involved as foster parents, to mentor children at school, to teach reading skills, to coordinate blood drives, and to do many other activities. The plight of the disadvantaged moved one group to organize a food pantry. People now provide food every month to feed 200 individuals.

Compassion ministry becomes infectious. We are not focused only on Judea, Samaria, and the remotest parts of the earth. Some of the people in our Jerusalem also need help. We do not want to step over needy people in our own congregation as we care for those

outside our walls. It is hard to get people to care about others if they do not feel like anyone cares for them.

Part of our strategy includes helping senior adults clean their homes, yards, and apartments; getting parents involved in children's ministry; providing pastoral care for the elderly and those in hospitals and nursing homes; providing benevolence assistance for families and individuals struggling financially; offering counseling resources for people with emotional, relational, and spiritual difficulties; and providing support groups for those suffering from addiction, grief, divorce, and other related problems and needs.

Furthermore, the care strategy has infused new energy, vision, and resources into projects we have been doing for years, including building four orphanages in Uganda, Bible schools in Mexico, digging water wells in Africa, planting churches, Life Schools for 3,700 students, and Meals on Wheels.

#### **Community-Wide Campaign Enlists People in Compassion Efforts**

I conducted a campaign to teach, inspire, and enlist people to reach out and touch someone near them with the love of God using a daily devotional in the Book of Acts called *Act Normal*. During the 9 weeks of this campaign, I preached on topics from Luke's account of the Early Church and encouraged people to get their hands dirty in serving others. Small-group content enabled people to dig deeper into the Scriptures and discuss how they can make a difference.

In the campaign, I asked people to make a pledge of dollars and hours of service. Contributions of money and time all go directly to agencies and church activities designed to minister to the needs of people in the community. We connect our people with a wide range of effective organizations. Instead of just preaching about what people should do, we give them inspiration and opportunities to get involved. We hear stories of God touching individuals, small groups, families, and neighborhoods with the message of His grace.

Three years ago the mayor told me our church had a problem. In fact, in some ways, our efforts were counterproductive. Since then, God is helping The Oaks Fellowship to reframe its mission. No longer are we a

*The care strategy has infused new energy, vision, and resources into projects we have been doing for years.*



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## NEW LIFE COACHES: CARING STRATEGY FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

**We have seen a spike in first-time visitors and salvations** since becoming more focused on serving the community with a consistent care strategy.

We do not openly use other organizations to promote The Oaks church; we partner with them to help people. Our volunteers share their faith as individuals, not as a church organization. We let people share their faith as the Lord leads them.

Most new people coming into our church have very little or no church background. When people got saved, they would say, "Okay, now what?"

I became concerned over the long-term discipleship plan we had in place for new Christians. I could not bear the thought that all these people would get saved and then 6 months later not be in church and growing in Christ. We determined that our Care Strategy should do more than just serve the community. It should also take care of the new Christians entrusted to us.

We average 20 people a week making first-time decisions for Christ. When they come to the altar, I greet them along with a New Life Coach. All New Life Coaches are interviewed, screened, and trained to be frontline participants in the discipleship process.

New Life Coaches come forward to connect with individuals making first-time commitments to Christ as well as for people making recommitments (men with men and women with women). NLC escort individuals to the prayer room where they lead them in a confessional prayer, exchange e-mail addresses and phone numbers, and fill out decision cards for the church's files. That week new believers commit to complete, "Living for Jesus Christ," the first of four online Bible studies. New Life Coaches try to connect at least once a week by phone or for coffee, but they are always available by phone or e-mail if a new believer needs prayer or has a question. Sometimes the connection stays somewhat formal, but the NLC and new convert often become good friends.

The goal for New Life Coaches is to help new Christians grow in their relationship with Christ by getting them engaged in the Word of God, following the Lord in water baptism, and joining the Alpha Class that meets at the church every Wednesday night. Alpha is an 8-week class that covers the basics of Christianity and helps people develop

a spiritual growth plan. We place participants in the class in groups of 6–8. Each group has at least one NLC to help facilitate the spiritual discussions introduced by the Alpha video curriculum. (Alpha materials can be ordered at [gospelpublishing.org](http://gospelpublishing.org).)

After the 8-week class is over, we help new Christians find their place in an ongoing small group that will embrace them and help them continue to grow in God.



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*No longer  
are we a  
fortress of people  
rushing into  
the community  
and back to  
safety.*

fortress of people rushing into the community and back to safety. We are passionate about leading people to Christ and are earning the right to be heard.

We are an incarnational church, embodying the life and love of Jesus as we live with the people in our community. This year the mayor and city council awarded our church

the Distinguished Service Award. At the presentation the mayor said, "Our city is a better place to live because of The Oaks Fellowship." All it took was a loving rebuke, a new sense of mission from God, and the power of the Spirit to accomplish His will in us, for us, through us, and now more than ever, with us. 🙏



**SCOTT WILSON**, senior pastor, The Oaks Fellowship, Dallas, Texas. He is the author of *Game Changer: 5 Essentials of an Effective Care Strategy*, designed to help churches discover, develop, and deploy a Christ-centered, community focused care strategy. For more information go to <http://leadia.tv/Leadia/?p=43>.





COMPASSION MINISTRY:  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# THE PRACTICE OF MISSION

► INTERVIEW WITH  
**ROCKY BARRA, WILFREDO DE JESÚS, AND JOHN McHAFFIE**

**M**any churches are doing compassion ministry. Other churches may want to start a compassion ministry but do not know where to begin. In this interview, *Enrichment* journal's associate editor, Richard L. Schoonover, visits with three pastors who are enthusiastic about compassion ministry.

**Rocky Barra** pastors Connection Church in Canton, Michigan. Since 1989, Barra has been sharing his church's vision to be the most caring place it can be. Little by little the church is adding compassion ministries.

**Wilfredo De Jesús** pastors New Life Covenant Church in Chicago, Illinois. New Life Covenant is an inner-city church with over 160 ministries to the homeless.

**John McHaffie** pastors Church on the Loop in Mount Vernon, Missouri. Church on the Loop is impacting the community as compassion ministry becomes the DNA of the church.

**What events or circumstances caused you to become involved in compassion ministry?**

**DE JESÚS** In Chicago, most of the city-funded shelters are on the south side. On the north side, where we are, there were no shelters to meet the needs of the Hispanic community.

The commissioner of the Department of Human Services approached me in 1997 to see if we would consider opening a shelter. I wasn't the pastor then, so I went to the church board and told them I believed God wanted us to start a shelter in our area.

After a weekend of discussions with the board and pastor, I received the go-ahead to start River of Life. We opened River of Life in 1997 and have since had thousands of homeless people come in.

The opening of River of Life was a defining moment that opened our hearts and jump-started us to become involved in compassion ministry.

**BARRA:** The impetus of our compassion ministries comes from two directions. One, if there is a need, we start small to try to meet it. If someone is struggling in a certain area, we put together a support group or provide



**BARRA**



**DE JESÚS**



**McHAFFIE**



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“  
*I learned that  
compassion  
is not an event;  
it is a lifestyle.*  
”

— McHaffie



Workers assist with cleanup following Missouri tornadoes in Wentworth and Joplin.

counseling to meet the need.

The other source comes from individuals who have a heart for compassion ministry. Nothing takes place without passionate leadership. Those who have a heart for a certain compassion ministry come to me. We talk, pray, and if it seems like the ministry will bear fruit, we do what we can to facilitate it.

**McHAFFIE:** Of the 250 consistently poor counties in the United States, 244 of them are in a rural setting. And the poverty rate nearly exceeds 35 percent in most of them.

Moving from a suburban mentality differed from the way I had experienced ministry in the past. I learned that compassion is not an event; it is a lifestyle. You live a lifestyle of compassion anywhere you live; but in rural areas, people filter in throughout the day with various needs. Getting compassion ministry to be part of the church's DNA is a discipleship factor with which we work.

Pastor Tommy Barnett says, “See the need and fill it.” I am seeing needs and God is opening doors.

### What is the scope of your compassion ministry?

**BARRA:** Our Open Door Ministry began fairly small, but last year we gave away over 1.5 million pounds of food. Now we distribute about 50,000 pounds a week. It is like a Convoy of Hope every week.

Strong leadership is helping this ministry grow. Some people have both mercy and administrative gifts, and they are doing a tremendous job utilizing them.

We do not see the community and local government as adversaries; we see them as partners. Without the help of a local foundation and Walmart, we could not afford to facilitate our Open Door Ministry as much as we do. They see what we are doing and have a heart to help.

Running our food ministry takes at least 75 people. Our local high schools include into their curriculum a certain number of hours for community service, so students come and serve. Some honor students enjoy it so much that after they complete their mandatory hours, they continue to serve.

We also have a ministry called My Sister Song that reaches out to women in the sex industry.

Many of our ministries dovetail together. We have a ministry called Common Ground where ladies from area churches come together four times a year and worship. Then we present a service project. The last time we did this, 32 churches and hundreds of ladies were involved. They all gave toward this specific need.

We also have a job bank that we update daily. We coordinate it with our Open Door Ministry. If people are looking for a job, in most cases we can help them get one, even if it is only a starting position. Our goal is not just to give handouts, but also to help people all the way up.

This has changed the DNA of our church. It is not uncommon to see a college professor sitting next to a homeless person or a veterinarian sitting next to someone who just got laid off from an assembly line. Once our church embraced compassion ministry, it became who we are, and opportunities started opening up for the church.

**McHAFFIE:** Compassion ministry is more than just passing out a truckload of food. Compassion ministry is when we help the person at the gas station — we do things for people.

I often work with the City of Mount Vernon and Lawrence County. A few years ago an ice storm devastated our area. We developed Community Emergency Response Teams, which are now part of our compassion ministry.

We also have a Wednesday night bus ministry where we pick up kids from rural areas and feed them.

As a small rural church we do not have significant resources. However, Steve Donaldson of Rural Compassion has come along side us and provided shoes, coats, and school backpacks that we have given to over 200 children. We also have done food drops in the community and book fairs in the city park using donated books.

I am working with other pastors in the community to have a service day on Saturday and Sunday. We have nearly 200 volunteers to help people clean out their houses and garages. It's a get-your-hands-dirty type of compassion ministry.

**DE JESÚS** Hope Fest, which started 6 years ago, is the largest back-to-school event in Chicago.

We adopted three high schools and 12 feeder schools. We want every child in those schools — over 6,000 of them — to get a free haircut, immunizations, a book bag, and a uniform.

The church has taken on the mission of reducing the student dropout rate and helping to alleviate poverty in the community. Politicians, the governor, and the mayor come to Hope Fest. In the last 2 years, Frito Lay and Pepsi Co. have paid for this event. It takes around 1,000 volunteers to minister to the 15,000-20,000 people who attend Hope Fest. This is one of our 160 compassion ministries.

The church owns a farm 3 hours from Chicago. Currently, 27 ex-prostitutes and drug addicts live on the farm and in our Dream Center. Every day we teach and disciple these women. We also opened a Teen Center for 15- to 16-year-old runaway girls; four girls are in our Teen Center right now. Manna for Life is a feeding program that feeds over 200 families every Saturday. Full-time pastors and volunteers run Manna for Life and the Dream Center.

These ministries give us access to the community. I meet with 15 school principals over lunch. Every school year we send apples on a stick along with a Scripture verse to all the teachers thanking them for educating our children. The church says these 6,000 kids are our kids. When there is a funeral, I am there. Our youth pastors are there. If a schoolroom needs painting, I bring in volunteers to paint. We also bless a school with baseball uniforms for their team.

#### How do you integrate evangelism into your compassion ministry?

**BARRA:** The media has inoculated people into believing that all Christians are interested in is either their money or their soul. People can sense when your heart or motive is to legitimately help them. Certainly we know that the greatest help we can ever give people is to lead them to Christ. However, to get to a person's heart, sometimes you first have to fill their stomachs.

We always provide some type of witness. However, if you are only doing compassion ministry to get somebody to cross that line of faith, you are negating an important aspect of the gospel according to Matthew 25. Through compassion ministries we have more people

coming to Christ than we do in our church services. Spiritual fruit will become evident as we do the things Christ says are important.

**McHAFFIE:** Romans 2:4 states that God's kindness leads people to repentance. It's a beautiful event to have Spirit-led kindness.

**DE JESÚS** I tell our people that we are seed planters. We are planting seeds of love. We do not care if they come to New Life Covenant as long as they come to the kingdom of God. And if we are a Kingdom-minded church, God will honor that. We evangelize with the love of God without necessarily preaching to them. Our actions speak that way.

At Hope Fest, we give people food, but we also have a time for evangelism. Attendees meet with counselors, and we also have 200 deacons who meet with families. We share Christ's love in a nonthreatening way. Last year we had over 1,600 families come to the Lord.

If you are only interested in doing compassion ministry because it will increase the number of givers or membership, your whole purpose is wrong. Compassion ministry has nothing to do with building your church; it has everything to do with what Christ has called us to do in Matthew 25.

#### How do you get members of your church interested in compassion ministry?

**McHAFFIE:** Some people may never emotionally experience compassion for the lost or compassion in general. Some people simply feel sorry for someone in need and don't do anything about it.

For me it's a matter of discipleship. I train and teach compassion from the example of the Early Church. The Early Church started with compassion for widows and orphans. Having this as part of our church's DNA is important. Compassion ministry is a lifelong pursuit.

**BARRA:** If I put something in the bulletin about a ministry opportunity, we might get two or three people to respond. If I announce it from the pulpit, maybe five. If we show a video of compassion ministry in action and tell the story, then we are going to touch people's heartstrings.

You also need to be personally involved. If your people never see you on the front lines,



Top: Attendees at "Girl's Night With a God Focus" collect items for an outreach. Left: My Sister Song, a ministry to strippers, offers prayer with women at a club. Above: Volunteers operate Open Door Ministry, a food pantry.



*We do not see  
the community  
and local  
government  
as adversaries;  
we see them  
as partners.*

”

— Barra





## THE PRACTICE OF MISSION (continued from page 55)



Top: Groceries are distributed at HopeFest, a back-to-school outreach. Bottom: Pastor De Jesús speaks at HopeFest.



“Through compassion ministries we have more people coming to Christ than we do in our church services.”

— De Jesús

they will not have a heart for compassion ministry.

**DE JESÚS** I get people involved with compassion ministry by showing the need, and how we can meet that need. After I saw the devastation from the tornado in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, I presented the need. On one Sunday I was able to fill a truck with supplies and sign up 15 volunteers to go to Alabama. As pastor, I also get involved. When I first started in 2000, I attended every event to shape the hearts of our people toward compassion.

I also show a video and say, “This is what I need. This is what we need to make this happen in Alabama, New Orleans, Joplin, or in Japan.” I continually expose our people to hurting people, and their hearts become softened.

### What role does discipleship play in your compassion ministry?

**BARRA:** It is not possible to legislate discipleship. We talk about the importance of compassion ministry. As we present opportunities, some people will catch the heart for compassion ministry.

We have systems in place for discipleship in some of our compassion ministries. We have a discipleship component in our food ministry: If they come to the discipleship meeting prior to when we pass out food, they get to go first.

Somewhere in the process, some begin to fall in love with Christ. That is exciting. Some people in our church used to live on the streets and were on drugs. They are now leading committed lives, are off the streets, and off drugs.

**McHAFFIE:** Newer people coming into the church want to be part of compassion ministry. This is important in small town rural America — they want to be involved in something bigger. Even those we have helped, or are still helping, want to be part of the process. Part of the discipleship process is getting people involved in some aspect of compassion ministries. We get them involved while still holding them accountable and supporting them.

**DE JESÚS** When we win people through compassion ministry, it is much easier for them to be involved in compassion ministry and for us to disciple them. For instance, if people

come to the Lord through Hope Fest, we get them plugged into our church. At the next Hope Fest, many join with us because that is where they were saved.

We have a 2-year School of Ministry for church members. We require second-year students to do compassion ministry. This is one way we disciple them to reach out to people.

Recipients of compassion ministry feel compassion is something God is calling them to do. They tie their involvement to their testimony. They feel they can use their testimony as a hook to reach others.

Not every church can do compassion ministry on a large scale because it entails a lot of work, a lot of planning, and money. However, churches that provide compassion ministry will produce disciples that will give back to the ministries that helped them. I tell our volunteers and staff, “Compassion ministry has to be a calling. It cannot be a make-me-feel-good event.”

**BARRA:** I wasn’t a Christ-follower until my 20s. I played music in nightclubs. The first three rows of people in our church service recently came out of nightclub bands. They are the most excited, the most involved people in the church.

Some are still a little rough around the edges, and I am not sure they would be welcome everywhere. But we love them. They are difference makers and give back in ministry what they received.

### Compassion ministry can be messy as you incorporate the recipients into your church. How do you help regular attendees adjust to the new people coming into your church?

**DE JESÚS** It is much easier for former prostitutes, gang members, or drug dealers, who now attend the church, to welcome people coming out of that lifestyle. You will see them waiting outside the church to welcome people they have invited.

Our calling is to be fishers of men. When we start “cleaning” people before they come into our church, we are taking the place of the Holy Spirit. We throw a net and bring them in. Good fish, big fish, fat fish, skinny fish. The job of the Holy Spirit is to clean them.

In 1997, when I wanted to start River of Life, I held the leaders and deacons hostage.



I stood in front of the door because their excuse was, "We just put in new rugs. We just put \$50,000 into this banquet hall, and you want to bring in homeless people?"

I said, "Absolutely, this is exactly who we are: Jesus in this community." You need that mentality. The gentleman who made that comment stood with me during my transition to becoming senior pastor. He obviously loved what our mission was becoming, even though he was previously uncomfortable reaching out to people. We were careful in how we approached compassion ministry so our people would not get frightened or feel threatened that someone would take their seats or it was going to smell.

**BARRA:** It isn't always easy incorporating "messy" people into your church. When things began to develop, mainly among the young people, we had unchurched young people coming. People said, "Have you seen all these young people?"

And I said, "Yes. Isn't it great?"

One man said, "Great? They don't know how to dress; they don't know how to act. Are we sure we want them here?"

I said, "If God is sending them here, then absolutely we want them here."

The man who complained left. Other people with a heart for outreach and for hurting people started to come. It's not the same church it was 20 years ago. Some say we wrecked it. And they are right; we wrecked it from what it was.

**McHAFFIE:** When I came to the rural church, the least, the last, and the lost were not the church's priority. It was a "we don't smoke; we don't chew; and we don't go with girls who do" type of church. I am learning that compassion ministry, in the rural setting, is tedious. Our population demographics have changed very little in the last 10 years — 400 since the latest census.

I am not seeing the change I would like to see in the people who have been around for a long time. I would love to say they will change and I want them to change. What I am seeing is change in our young people; they are much more compassionate than many of the adults. They are leading the way.

I keep reminding myself that people do not change overnight. If compassion ministry to be a lifestyle of the church, I must keep selling the vision over and over again.

#### **How do you transition people from being "inward focused" to "other focused"?**

**DE JESÚS** This starts from the top down. Pastors need to expose the need. The pastor has to go to the board and ask, "Does our budget reflect compassion ministry? What have we invested in the Kingdom towards the poor? Is there a percentage? Why aren't we doing compassion ministry? Why aren't we allocating money toward reaching the poor?"

That is how it happened in our church. It is an explosion now. We have people in Peru who are doing compassion ministry. People in your church will embrace compassion if you embrace it.

**BARRA:** In compassion ministry, you cross a line somewhere in the process, and once you cross it, you cannot go back. Compassion ministry becomes who you are.

The head of our prison ministry was the lieutenant in a biker gang. He is covered head to toe with tattoos. He had a cobra on his neck and he had it changed to praying hands. The leader of another ministry is a former stripper.

After people come to Christ, He works in them to make them strong. When you are forgiven much, you appreciate it much.

**McHAFFIE:** It takes time for some people to break old habits. When old habits are broken, it is important for the church to celebrate. A Sunday service, Sunday School class, or church website video are great places to share a personal testimony. When we begin to celebrate wins, we get more people on board because most people will give to something in which they believe. Churches do not always do a good job selling ideas. Look at what happens around the world. If there is an earthquake, rock stars in America raise several million dollars. The church can raise awareness and money by celebrating wins and exposing people in this way.

#### **How can compassion ministry change the perception of your church in the community?**

**BARRA:** I had a meeting with the township



“Some people may never emotionally experience compassion for the lost or compassion in general. Some people simply feel sorry for someone in need and don't do anything about it.”

— McHaffie





“  
Spiritually  
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on supernatural  
provision to fund  
our compassion  
ministry.”



— Barra

supervisor last week. He was talking about all the things we are doing for the community, and he does not even come to our church. Our local community foundation supports many of our efforts. Because there is such a deep woven fear of political incorrectness in the church, doing compassion ministry actually helps you in a community.

People may not come to your church, but they will speak about you as, “Oh, that’s the church that does this,” or “That’s the church that helps people.” Isn’t this one way in which we want to be known?

**McHAFFIE:** We change the community’s perception at a grassroots level. The rural Midwest is known as the Bible Belt. In the Bible Belt, people think if you are not a Christian, you are at least born a Baptist. So, compassion is to me Spirit-led kindness. It is not something we do. In some rural areas, churches have used compassion ministries as a means to get people to come to their church and only their church.

At Church on the Loop, compassion ministry is not a means to get people through the front door; we are compassionate because Jesus calls us to be compassionate. When I was at Central Bible College, I heard a chapel speaker say, “It’s not about me; it’s about Him, and it’s about them.”

I teach my congregation to assist ministries

already in progress. For instance, this weekend we have six churches and 200 people signed up for the service day weekend. Approximately 40 to 50 people from our church are involved. Our back-to-school party is a fun event for our community. The city council asked me to open their meeting with prayer after the event. This has opened up doors of opportunity.

**DE JESÚS** Compassion ministry gives us credibility with the police department, local government, and politicians. If the school system is going to move a principal in one of the 15 schools, they call me and ask, “Reverend, can we meet with you?” Then they bring school administrations from downtown because they know our church is involved in the fabric of these schools and they need, as they put it, the religious community to be a part of this. They seek our counsel.

In Deuteronomy 28:13, Moses told the people that God would make them “the head, and not the tail.” Churches in our community, city, and country need to act like the head. We need to lead the way to bring hope to the people.

**How do you fund a compassion ministry? What resources are available to pastors wanting to begin a ministry of compassion?**

**DE JESÚS** Recently I spoke at the Nebraska District Council. I said, “All you need is \$100 to do compassion work. You don’t need \$100,000; you don’t need \$10,000. You start with what you have. You can’t wait for the government to give you a grant.”

We do the work of God and trust what Psalm 50:10 says: God owns “the cattle on a thousand hills.” Do ministry. Even if it’s only \$100, do it. Love people, and see God bring in the money.

New Life decided not to participate in the recession. We believe the Kingdom operates in faith. Our resources are from tithes, offerings, and pledges. We have had one grant for River of Life since 1997. The Dream Center, the farm, and Manna for Life are all supported through tithes and offerings.

**McHAFFIE:** Thankfully it takes more than money to fulfill the call to compassion. Faith and obedience are essential. A few people in



the church who believe in the mission fund most of our compassion ministry. Other people will give money when we communicate a specific need by e-mail. For example, a lady in our church could not pay her electric bill. By the end of the day we had more than enough to pay her electric bill. Compassion delivered that day.

Compassion might be as simple as going to the gas station and putting gas in someone's car or buying groceries for a single mother. One-on-one compassion ministry in rural areas is very effective. I teach people with the Word of God to do compassion on a daily basis, wherever they are to whomever.

**BARRA:** Spiritually speaking, we rely on supernatural provision to fund our compassion ministry. In addition, we apportion a percentage of our offerings from benevolence and missions for compassion ministries.

**Compassion workers can get discouraged or become cynical if they see people coming to the food pantry in an Escalade. How do you deal with that?**

**BARRA:** Once in a while someone will play the system. Rather than being frustrated, I remind my workers they are giving to the Lord, and He's parlaying provision as He sees fit. When you pick and choose who should receive assistance, you may use human value judgments in the process, rather than allowing God to run the ministry His way.

**McHAFFIE:** Romans 2:4 reminds us: "It is kindness that leads them to repentance." If they are in an Escalade, they still need Jesus. If they are scamming the system, maybe your kindness will be one step closer to them coming to Christ.

**How do you minister to the undocumented people who come to your church or compassion outreach? How do you handle those situations?**

**DE JESÚS** Three years ago over 370 people were arrested in one factory in Postville, Iowa. Although I am Puerto Rican, this issue did not really hit home because I was an American citizen. But I was invited to Postville with four congressmen and some community leaders to talk to these women who had been incarcerated. My heart was moved.

Since that time, I have traveled to 17 cities speaking on behalf of the undocumented. This is a moral issue. It is the stranger; it is the person on the road. This is the story of the Good Samaritan that Jesus shared.

As a church, we support our undocumented brothers and sisters. Close to 40 percent of the undocumented are evangelicals. They are not murderers or rapists. Many have been in our country for 20 years. Because our system is broken, the government is deporting approximately 400,000 undocumented people a year. We want to make sure as a church we get involved with the undocumented campaign to call for immigration reform. We are vocal about it. We will sign our signature to it. This is an issue that is in the forefront of our church.

**McHAFFIE:** Currently, immigration is not an issue for my church. Some day it may be because of where we are located. However, I am for immigration reform. I believe the gospel is for all people. If someone needs a drink of water, I will give him a drink, even if he does not have papers. I believe all people should have the opportunity to hear and experience the love of Christ in action. I also support the law to the fullest degree.

**Any closing comments?**

**DE JESÚS** For 35 years we were an inward-focused church. For the past 10 years we have become an outward-focused church. I encourage pastors to make a difference wherever they are, regardless of church size. Every church can make a difference.

**BARRA:** Making the transition from an inward-focused church to an outward-focused is the most difficult change any pastor or leadership team will ever have to face. It is not glamorous, nor is it easily accomplished, but it definitely is front-line ministry. It is the gospel in action.

**McHAFFIE:** I pray that pastors — whether in rural, suburban, or urban settings — will remember that the church in the Book of Acts showed compassion toward orphans and widows. We've been told to clothe ourselves in compassion and kindness, and this kindness leads others to repentance. ☺



Workers distribute school backpacks at HopeFest in Chicago.



“Moses told the people that God would make them “the head, and not the tail.” Churches in our community, city, and country need to act like the head. We need to lead the way to bring hope to the people.



— De Jesús





**COMPASSION MINISTRY:**  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# RURAL COMPASSION FOR THE HARVEST:

## *Small Towns, Big Possibilities*

► BY **STEVE DONALDSON AND KENT ANDERSON**

**R**ick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, authors of *The Externally Focused Church*, state, “If your church vanished, would your community weep? Would anyone notice? Would anyone care?” When people in your community face challenges, does your church immediately come to their minds? Is your church showing God’s mercy, giving people what they need?

For the pastor in the smaller community, Rusaw and Swanson believe, “The question, ‘How big is our church?’ should be replaced with ‘How big is the impact our church is making in our community?’”<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 50 million Americans live in non-metropolitan areas. Using the federal government’s definition of rural, 49 percent of Assemblies of God churches are in the open country, village, and small town category. Pastors and churches in these communities have a tremendous opportunity to reach their communities through compassion ministry.

### **Rural America’s Poverty**

Rural America is not, as many believe, simply

swaying corn, picket fences, county fairs, and tractor pulls. Rural America is no longer Mayberry RFD. Poverty is very much a part of rural America.

Pembroke, Illinois, population 3,000, is 70 miles south of Chicago. It is Illinois’ most impoverished community. Fifty-five percent of the residents live beneath the poverty level and 40 percent live without running water. Some homes are without electricity and have dirt floors. The unemployment rate in 2010 was 44 percent, and the average family income was \$14,000, up from \$9,700 in 2005. Pembroke has no bank, drugstore, medical facility, and few paved roads.







Photos.com





*Every church  
must move  
forward  
in outreach  
knee first.  
The best place  
to start is with  
leadership.*

In 2005, Oprah Winfrey dedicated a show on Pembroke. She said, "I grew up poor with no running water. It's shocking that there are people who don't have running water in their homes."<sup>2</sup>

In that show, Pastor Jon Dyson described the town: "What's really amazing is these people have survived here all this time with little or nothing with third-world conditions in some areas." Dyson says every day is a struggle for survival. The town receives few tax dollars, so it cannot afford emergency services, police and fire departments, trash pickup, tornado warning systems, and animal control. Adding to their plight, on June 9, 2010, without warning, a tornado struck Pembroke. Even though the state had awarded the community \$32,000 for an emergency warning system, the town never received the money.<sup>3</sup>

Another example of need in rural America took place recently in Arkansas. One of our partners delivered a care package that included toothbrushes to a family of seven living in a mobile home. As our partner entered the home, a 7-year-old girl looked into the package and quickly removed a toothbrush. Tears streamed down her face. Our partner wondered, *Did I do something wrong? Is it the wrong color?*

The girl disappeared down the hallway. In a matter of minutes she returned with the new toothbrush in one hand and an old toothbrush in the other. The bristles on the old toothbrush were worn down to nothing. The girl said, "Thanks, ma'm, for bringing us this new

toothbrush. We've all been using this one."

The following statistics reveal the needs in many of America's rural areas.

- 88 percent of persistent poverty counties are rural.<sup>4</sup>
- One in five children in rural America live in deep poverty.<sup>5</sup>
- A rural teen is more likely to misuse drugs and alcohol than an urban teen.<sup>6</sup>
- 15.1 percent of rural Americans are considered poor compared to 12.5 percent of urban Americans.<sup>7</sup>
- Rural areas have more single-guardian households.<sup>8</sup>
- Families in rural areas have less access to services, support for disabilities, and quality educational opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

Rural areas struggle with unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, and domestic abuse. According to Pew Research Service, the leading problem in rural America is drug abuse. A rural pastor in Missouri told us the main sources of income in his community of 500 people are welfare assistance and meth production.

Pastors who live in these situations understand the vastness of the poverty around them. They may wonder, with their own limited resources, how they can minister to those in need. Many times this process starts with a change in focus.

### **Becoming Externally Focused**

If being externally focused is important, how can a rural church become externally focused? Here are a few guidelines to help churches move toward this objective:

**Plan wisely.** You may need to change your church's outreach mentality to where it sees cleaning up the local park is as spiritual as doing an Easter musical. A pastor must seek God's timetable for change. It takes wisdom to blend cultures, generations, styles, and preferences in a rural church.

**Pray persistently.** Every church must move forward in outreach knee first. The best place to start is with the pastor and leadership. Pray for the church to reach hurting people. Set aside a Wednesday night or Sunday night service for corporate prayer. Organize a prayer walk through your town.

**Proclaim it.** The pastor must regularly and consistently teach and preach on evangelism, outreach, and serving. Have members of your



**"For Sunday dinner? When is the last time a homeless person invited us to his home for a meal?"**



congregation share victories they experience in their outreaches. Every church member needs to realize that no act of service is too menial.

**Participate regularly.** The pastor is the most important person to get involved in serving and building relationships in the community. When you share stories of personal wins in building relationships in your community and serving others, you will encourage and ignite your congregation to do the same. You cannot teach what you do not know, and you cannot lead where you will not go.

### Reaching Your Community

A change from an inward to outward focus is only part of the solution. The church must also find practical ways to reach and serve the community. Here are 11 practical outreach ideas rural churches can implement:

**1. Assess the needs of your community.** Pastors can uncover needs in their community that others are not addressing. Websites such as epodunk.com, census.gov, and dataplace.org will help you assess your community. Ask members of your community what they feel are their most pressing needs. Ask, "In your opinion, what would be the best thing our church could do for our town?"

**2. Meet with community gatekeepers.** A rural pastor must be intentional in developing solid relationships with community leaders. Gatekeepers can be the mayor, school principal, high school coach, or others. Community leaders know firsthand the issues their community is facing.

**3. Become a friend of your school system.** The question every rural church must ask

is, "How can we wrap our arms around our local school?" In a rural setting, the school is the hub of the community. We recently talked to a school principal, and he said, "I think the church folks in this town hate us. They only show up to my office and school board meetings and complain."

Some churches bring cinnamon rolls to the teachers' lounge and coffee and donuts to bus drivers. They provide reading buddies, do after-school programs, honor teachers and staff, provide supplies for classrooms, and do projects around the school.

**4. Community involvement.** How can the church plug into the community calendar? What events are taking place throughout the year that your church could join? What sporting events and holiday celebrations can the church be involved in? What does the community offer in the way of meals on wheels, senior center activities, etc., in which your church can partner?

Offer an event for your community such as a kidsfest in the park, mega sports camp, hunting clinic, horse-riding clinic, etc. Connect with your firefighters and police and host a hero day for them and their families.

**5. Have an adoption program.** What groups, places, or organizations could your church adopt? This program could include adopting teachers, social workers, firefighters, sports teams, classrooms, the senior center, or the local park. One church in Kansas adopted the town's main street and the youth washed all the windows of the downtown businesses. A rural church in Iowa painted the benches on Main Street.



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## RURAL COMPASSION

Rural Compassion is a team of U.S. missionaries assisting rural pastors and churches by helping them serve and reach their communities for Christ. Rural Compassion conducts seminars to teach rural pastors and churches to serve and impact their communities.

For more information contact:

**Rural Compassion**  
5517 Farmer Branch Rd. #140  
Ozark, MO 65721

Web: [www.ruralcompassion.org](http://www.ruralcompassion.org)  
E-mail: [info@ruralcompassion.org](mailto:info@ruralcompassion.org)





*The impact  
of a powerful  
Pentecostal  
church in a  
community  
should make it  
a better place  
for people to live.*

**6. Become a specialty provider.** Many rural churches do not have the capacity to run a food pantry, clothing closet, or thrift store. Become the church that has a specialty item — diapers, baby formula, underwear and socks, hygiene products.

One church in Montana offers firewood for people in the area. Another church in West Virginia designated a Sunday School room for teachers and offered them supplies for their classroom.

**7. Offer a need-based program.** Offer a program based on the findings of your assessment. Programs like Celebrate Recovery, Marriage Encounter, Financial Peace, Angel Food ministry, single moms ministry, and MOPS can be a way to reach out to people in need.

**8. Create a helping hands ministry.** Organize a Sunday School class or small group focused solely on outreach. The class or small group prays, plans, and implements ministry to the community. One church asks each ministry to do one service project each year. A church then could have ministry going on in its

community every month.

**9. Prepare your church for emergency response.** Partner with organizations such as Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), Red Cross, emergency personnel, etc. Train church members to be first responders when disaster hits.

**10. Conduct a one-day outreach.** Plan a day for an outreach that might include distributing school supplies, clothing, shoes, coats, etc. Partner with social services, such as medical, dental, and businesses. A rural church in Illinois conducted a one-day outreach called Sharefest and had over 600 in attendance. The town's population is 2,000.

**11. Partner with suburban churches.** These relationships include opportunities to serve the vision of the rural church. Suburban churches can take mission trips to small towns for evangelistic outreach, to work on facilities, and for humanitarian assistance. Some create a sister church relationship where they assist financially. Larger congregations with specialized staff can create structure for ministry to

children, youth, seniors, or worship.

Many rural pastors are bivocational and live on a limited income. Suburban churches can bless the rural pastor financially. One suburban church takes its Wednesday night offering to help rural pastors and also has a closet of new items available to rural pastors. Churches that have leadership training resources can make these materials available to rural pastors who do not have funds to buy these items.

Suburban churches also work with Rural Compassion to sponsor weekend training for about 20 rural pastors and their spouses. This training teaches rural pastors how to effectively reach their communities.

## Conclusion

One church contacted the school principal for a way it could serve the school. The principal asked if they would paint and clean up some of the classrooms during the summer. The church sent a group to clean and paint a classroom of a teacher who was unchurched. At the end of the day the teacher commented, "If this is Christianity, then I am interested."

If we want to influence our community, the best way is the Jesus way — to serve into the lives of the people in our town. "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

The impact of a powerful Pentecostal church in a community should make it a better place for people to live. As General Superintendent George O. Wood said, "We must have substantial evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit." Our prayer should be, "Let my heart break with the things that break God's heart."

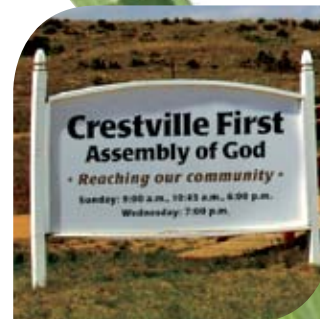
The Old Testament law sets a pattern of caring

for the needs in our communities, "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien" (Leviticus 23:22).

Every rural church needs to have a corner of its ministry focused on reaching outside its four walls with the love of Christ. "When being is divorced from doing, pious thoughts become a substitute for washing dirty feet."<sup>10</sup> How big of an impact does your church have in your community? 🌱

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*A change from an inward to outward focus is only part of the solution. The church must also find practical ways to reach and serve the community.*



**STEVE DONALDSON** is founder and president, Rural Compassion, Ozark, Missouri.



**KENT ANDERSON** is a missionary working with Rural Compassion, Ozark, Missouri.



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COMPASSION MINISTRY:  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# MERCY RISING: *A Call to Love the Immigrant*

► BY **SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ**

Viable compassionate immigrant outreach may result not only in the salvation of the immigrant community, but also in the salvation of the American church.



**A**s we contextualize 21st-century American Christianity, we must apply Kingdom optics that will enable us to properly view our surroundings with Christ-centered and Spirit-filled compassion.

Our nation currently exhibits a dramatic transformative shift in its demographic landscape. This requires strategic deliberation for a Kingdom-culture multiethnic outreach. By mid-century, for the first time, America's population will be, as it pertains to ethnic composition, majority nonwhite.

The recent immigration debate has removed the graveclothes from an entire segment of our populace. This exposes an unprecedented opportunity for outreach and evangelism that will transform the face of Christianity in America.

From Wall Street and Madison Avenue to Washington, D.C., American corporations, politicians, and leaders understand the potential embedded within the immigrant community, especially the thriving Hispanic-American community. While corporate America engages Hispanic consumers, and political operatives recruit Hispanic voters, the church stands ready to reap a Hispanic harvest.

Historical suppositions that exclusively limited the necessity for outreach to immigrant population to churches in California, Texas, Florida, New York, and the Southwest, no longer apply. Today immigrants live in communities from North Dakota to Wyoming, from Maine to Alabama. As a result, any church committed to a viable 21st-century growth matrix must include an immigrant outreach strategy that includes compassion ministries.

Demographic realities and sheer numbers demand that the church engage this community. Let us consider the statistics. According to the 2010 census, the Hispanic population — at 16.39 percent of the U.S. population — is the largest minority group in the country.<sup>1</sup> With over 50 million members, this community exemplifies future growth capacity made evident by the fact 75 percent of Hispanics are under 40 years of age and 34 percent are 18 years or younger. According to the 2010 census, 27.6 percent

of the U.S. population (including Hispanics) is of ethnic origin. (See sidebar, "United States Population by Race: 2010").

By 2020, the Latino population will total roughly 102.6 million people or 25 percent of the United States population. The future of American Christianity, evangelicalism, and the next great harvest lies in the Hispanic and immigrant community, whether or not we reach out with compassion.

### Vertical Empowerment for Horizontal Outreach

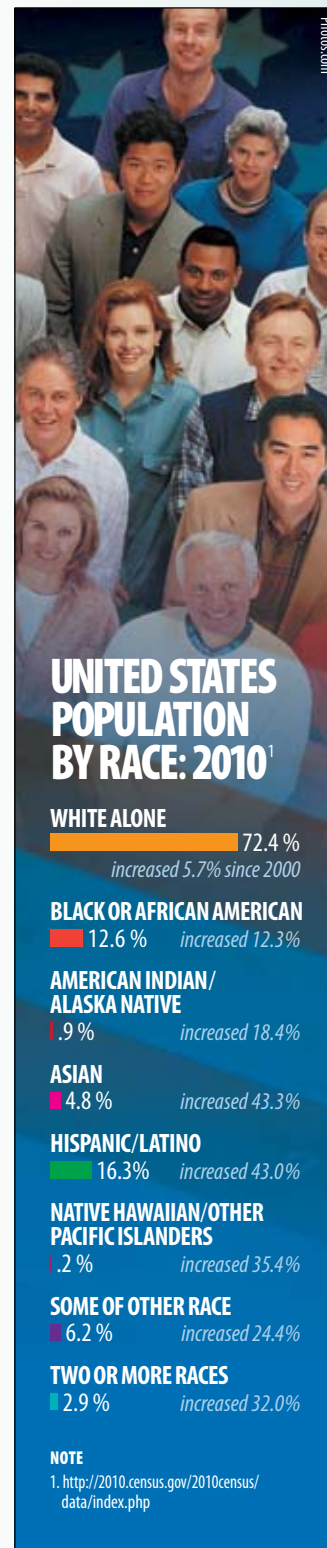
A clear and practical articulation of a biblical worldview based on the message of the Cross will empower compassionate outreach to the immigrant. Why the Cross? The Cross represents the quintessential platform from which to do ministry.

No other symbol incorporates passion and promise like the Cross. A simple symbol depicting two pieces of wood — one vertical and the other horizontal — successfully brands the eternal hope of glory to all mankind.

Vertically, we stand connected to God, His kingdom, eternal life, spiritual truths, divine principles, and glory. Horizontally, we exist through community, relationships, family, culture, and society.

Far too long people have lived either vertically or horizontally, but few, even in Christian leadership, have succeeded in living and ministering from the place where the vertical and horizontal planes of the cross intersect — the nexus of Christianity, compassionate evangelism.

To reach the lost in a multiethnic, digital world, we need a church committed to the



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*The church carries a biblical imperative to reach all people.*



#### **OFFICIAL ASSEMBLIES OF GOD STATEMENT ON IMMIGRATION**

**It is appropriate for the borders of the United States to be secure** in order for immigration to conform to the laws of the United States. As people of faith we support comprehensive immigration reform that reflects human dignity, compassion, and justice integral to a "nation under God." Apart from issues related to governmental jurisdiction, we believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ compels us to minister to all who live or work within our country.

— General Council of the Assemblies of God  
(adopted September 20, 2006)

[ag.org/top/About/immigration.cfm](http://ag.org/top/About/immigration.cfm)

vertical *and* horizontal. We need a church committed to saving the lost and transforming communities; addressing sin and confronting injustice, pro-life, and pro-poverty alleviation; ending religious persecution and human trafficking. To fulfill the biblical mandate to make disciples, the American church must intentionally exercise compassionate outreach to fulfill the Great Commission.

#### **Compassion Ministries, Immigrants, and the Undocumented**

In spite of the demographic shift, there exists some trepidation within Christian ministry concerning immigrant outreach. Some ask, "How do you reach out to a community that includes undocumented individuals? Are there legal ramifications or obligations as we render services to these individuals?"

First, the church carries a biblical imperative to reach all people. Christ admonished us to make disciples of all people while simultaneously reminding us that we can only measure the viable execution of His Word in how we treat the most in need: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). We can trace biblical mandates to engage in compassionate evangelistic outreach to Leviticus 19:33,34: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as a native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

Carlos Campo, president of Regent University, addresses this concern via the lens of the prophet Isaiah: "The undocumented are surely the poor wanderers of our day. Pastors have a moral duty to respond to them as they would any other brother or sister in need."

Albert Reyes, president of Buckner Services, believes that pastors and churches that reach out to the immigrant in essence deliver the same redemptive outreach exhibited by the Good Samaritan.

Today's American immigrant may represent the most alienated and rejected segment of our society — today's least of them. As with many of today's divisive issues, Bible-believing Americans carry a moral and biblical responsibility to offer facilitative platforms that activate the ministry of reconciliation.

Evangelicals and Christians committed to spreading the gospel must incorporate prophetic witness that heals communities, ushers in peace, and exalts righteousness and justice.

As we engage in compassion ministries, we must not allow the issues that fall under the purview of the federal government to distract us. Pastor Daniel DeLeon of Santa Ana, California, captured the spirit of outreach when he declared, "When I stand at the church to receive people, we don't ask them what their legal status is for we are concerned with the heart and not the card. In addition, we are not officers of the government; we are servants of the Lord."

To that end, the Kingdom metric of Christian witness lies within the rubric of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God. Our mission is to fulfill the Great Commission, equip the saints, make disciples, and worship God in Spirit and in truth. Let Uncle Sam enforce immigration laws while we embrace a church that reaches the lost for Christ.

#### **Risk management and liabilities**

If we exercise the biblical mandate of compassionately reaching out to all people, including immigrants, can a church suffer legal consequences for immigrant outreach especially if the individuals we minister to are undocumented?

The Department of Justice, the Attorney General's Office, Congressional representatives, White House officials, secular adjudicators, and ecclesiastical authorities all agree on one irrefutable fact: biblical ministry and outreach to immigrants, regardless of their status, carries no legal liability.

"With the exception of deliberately employing undocumented individuals or transporting them across state lines, which does construe a violation of the law, clergy are uniformly protected by federal and state statutes throughout the United States," explained Everardo Zavala, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference chief legal counsel.

#### **Immigrant Outreach**

There are several principles churches must follow if they are going to successfully reach immigrants. Inner-city and urban churches often have the neighborhood margins for effective immigrant outreach. Rural churches



may need to strategically plan to effectively reach out to the immigrant community with compassion. The Hispanic National Association of Evangelicals and the Hispanic Mega Church Association created a rubric of immigrant compassionate outreach. This includes what all churches, especially rural and smaller-size churches, need to incorporate to successfully reach the immigrant community. The rubric includes: leadership engagement, symbiotic language-oriented programming, aesthetics, and community-building techniques.

### Ethno-Cultural Contextualization

Compassion ministries must seek to build trust with the immigrant community by removing cumbersome documentation that may alienate the very community they intend to serve. Since the law protects ministries, they need to minimize bureaucratic practices that alienate rather than engage. For example, while certain food-distribution ministries require registration, this does not need to serve as a deterrent for engagement as long as the registration process does not require proof of citizenship or questions surrounding legal status. Nevertheless, the most effective immigrant-focused compassion ministries require minimal disclosure of private information. The vast majority of compassionate outreach services require little to zero documentation.

When the American church understands that it carries the spiritual and legal authority to assist the immigrant, the potential exists to emerge as the only trustworthy institution in the eyes of the community. Some immigrants feel trepidation and angst toward local, state, and federal agencies that assist in food and needs-specific services. Many immigrants, however, consider the church the sole sanctuary for both spiritual and physical needs. "If immigrants cannot trust the church, who can they trust?" inquired Mauricio Elizondo, Hispanic American Assemblies of God church planter.

"Many low-income Hispanic immigrant families avoid government agencies because they fear deportation. They work many hours in the fields and yet do not have enough to feed or provide for the basic needs of their families. We bear witness to the fact poverty, hunger, and despair have increased exponentially in the past few years in the immigrant community. With that reality we encounter an

unfortunate simultaneous increase in many social ills such as addiction, domestic violence, teen pregnancy, and the proliferation of gang activity. The only hope is the church of Jesus Christ," declared Elizondo.

Gilbert Velez understands firsthand the dynamics of compassionate ministry. Velez is senior pastor of the 2,500-member Mercy Church, an Assemblies of God congregation in Laredo, Texas. Velez also oversees the Hispanic Mega Church Association. "Compassion ministries must begin not just with services, goods, and outreach. But to effectively reach and engage the immigrant community, compassion ministries must build trust," explained Velez.

### Leadership Engagement

According to Velez, "Any ministry committed to reaching the immigrant needs to employ personnel who speak the language and understand the cultural terrain." Compassion outreach begins at the leadership

*Many immigrants consider the church the sole sanctuary for both spiritual and physical needs.*



## ALIEN INVASION

**Forty-million aliens live in America.** Scripture often uses the words "alien," "strangers," "foreigners," "sojourners." Who are these people? They are individuals who are foreign-born. If you are born in America, but now live in Canada, you are an alien. Likewise, if you live in the United States but are foreign-born you are an alien.

Aliens come from all over the world and live in all 50 states. God has given the American church an opportunity to reach the nations of the world.

Approximately 700,000 foreign-born college students are in America. If a college or university is in your community, it is likely that hundreds of aliens are on that campus. Imagine reaching the nations with the love of God by showing hospitality to the international students living in your city.

God commands us to express friendship and extend hospitality to the aliens in our midst. Here are nine reasons to minister to the aliens in your community.

1. God commands His people to be kind to aliens (Leviticus 19:33,34; Deuteronomy 26:8–12).
2. God does miracles for aliens by answering their prayers (2 Chronicles 6:32,33).
3. God does miracles on behalf of His people who are kind to aliens (2 Corinthians 9:6–10).
4. God can save them from sin (Numbers 9:14).
5. God was kind to us when we were aliens to Him (Ephesians 2:12,17–19).
6. God reminds us to live like aliens in this world (1 Peter 2:9–12).
7. God will refresh you (Proverbs 11:25).
8. You might refresh an angel without knowing it (Genesis 18:1–8; Hebrews 13:1,2).
9. You will refresh Jesus when you refresh an alien (Matthew 25:35–40).

— **SCOTT TEMPLE**, national director,  
Office of Ethnic Relations, General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri



level. Any church committed to reaching the immigrant community must include ethnic and immigrant leadership in its governance. This will secure an institutionalized commitment rather than a token or temporary effort. For example, if I want to plant a church and attract various ethnicities, church growth models indicate I will attract what I reflect in my leadership from the praise and worship to the ushers and staff. My leadership team must reflect the community I desire to serve.

"Some within the immigrant community view all nonethnics, including ministries, as possible extensions of law enforcement that may result in deportation and separation of families. As a result, to combat misinformation in the community, compassionate outreach must engage bilingual staff to secure appropriate dissemination of services. People trust those who speak their native tongue," continues Velez.

For smaller or rural churches that do not have the finances to hire bilingual personnel, Velez notes the exponential growth of bilingual volunteers in almost all states and regions. "One would be hard pressed to find a community where the church cannot find a bilingual person who can help them. It could be a teacher or college student. Spanish is the number one secondary language in our nation. Engaging a bilingual staffer is as easy as a bulletin board announcement

or a Facebook posting. It works."

### **Symbiotic Language-oriented Programming**

Symbiotic language-oriented programming means that any ministry committed to immigrant outreach must learn to speak the language of the community but, simultaneously, must stand ready to teach the community the language of the church. In other words, it is not just learning to speak Spanish. Viable immigrant outreach can assist in providing English and ESOL courses to the immigrant community. A pastor in Texas said, "We will learn Spanish, bring them to church where we provide English courses. The church can serve as the primary institution for both vertical integration into the Kingdom and horizontal integration into American society."

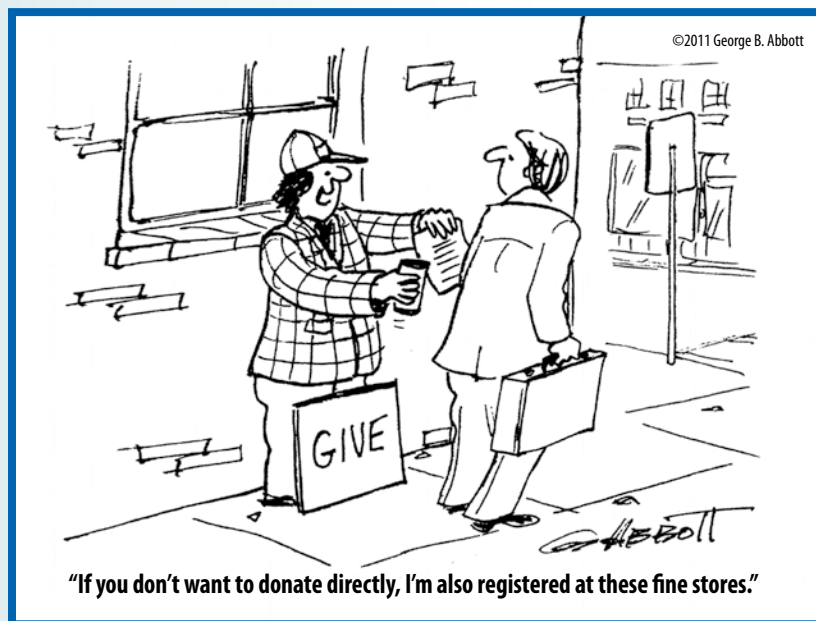
Velez added that trust begins with speaking the language of the community and hiring personnel who understand the culture. "Ethno cultural contextualization of any outreach is vital for effectiveness."

### **Aesthetics**

Compassionate immigrant outreach requires branding the outreach in a marketable manner consistent with the colors, fonts, and preferences of the community. This requires a simple cultural orientation. Ministries that desire to reach the immigrant communities must understand the basic threads embedded in the ethos of the community from food to music, colors, and particularities. A 101-cultural orientation can result in a great harvest.

Compassionate evangelistic outreach must incorporate messaging in both languages. Some ministries exhibit the appropriate spirit but poorly execute the outreach for lack of language-friendly resources. For example, a primarily Anglo congregation in Dallas decided to reach out to immigrants with educational resources at the beginning of the school year. They targeted Hispanic families with school-age children. Church staffers rented a parking lot in the heart of the community, set up a truck, and brought in new backpacks stuffed with pencils, notebooks, calculators, and other school supplies.

Unfortunately, although they were in the right place at the right time doing the right thing, few families took advantage of the outreach. Why? Ministry organizers discovered



## ADDITIONAL STATISTICS ON HISPANIC POPULATION GROWTH

Hispanics account for more than half of nation's growth in past decade:

[www.pewresearch.org/pubs/1940/hispanic-united-states-population-growth-2010-census](http://www.pewresearch.org/pubs/1940/hispanic-united-states-population-growth-2010-census)

Five states with the biggest Latino population growth so far as census numbers roll out:

<http://multiamerican.scp.org/2011/02/five-states-with-the-biggest-latino-population-growth-so-far-as-2010-census-numbers-roll-out/>

Hispanic population:

[www.censusscope.org/us/map\\_hispanicpop.html](http://www.censusscope.org/us/map_hispanicpop.html)

Total Hispanic population (most recent) by state:

[www.statemaster.com/graph/peo\\_tot\\_his\\_pop-people-total-hispanic-population](http://www.statemaster.com/graph/peo_tot_his_pop-people-total-hispanic-population)

after the event that all their advertisement was in English. Effective compassionate outreach to the immigrant community requires linguistically contextualizing the mission in both Spanish and English. In short, compassion and culture must intersect for effective evangelism to take place.

### Community-building Techniques

Churches must define ethnic and immigrant outreach via the conduit of community. While American and Western European models embrace and celebrate the individual, Hispanic and immigrant groups embrace both a commitment to individual achievement and community mobilization. In the words of Jesse Miranda, executive presbyter of the Assemblies of God and chief executive officer of the Hispanic National Association of Evangelicals: "Celebrating culture and embracing the distinctive threads of our people can only lead to the mosaic we call the Kingdom. We need to go from orthodoxy to orthopraxy to orthopathos. That is to say, we need ethnic outreach that begins in the head, moves to the hand, and finishes in the heart — the heart of the community."

### The Agenda of the Lamb

Compassion-based evangelism stems not from the narrative of a political ideology but

rather from the heart of prophetic witness. Reaching out to Hispanics, and other immigrants — whether legal or undocumented — may not reflect the agenda of the donkey or the elephant, but it does reflect the agenda of the Lamb. These immigrants, particularly Hispanic immigrants, stand poised to change the Christian experience by broadening the evangelical agenda, incorporating a transformational missiology, reigniting a prophetic socio/political movement, and globally serving as ambassadors of a Kingdom-culture ethos that reconciles righteousness with justice.

In essence, the Hispanic immigrant demonstrates affinity toward the core values that permeate the American Bible-believing Spirit-filled church — commitment to biblical orthodoxy, holiness, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Without a doubt, Hispanic and other immigrant Christians will emerge as the firewall of righteousness and justice in the 21st century against spiritual apathy, moral relativism, and cultural decay.

Viable compassionate immigrant outreach may very well serve as the balm of Gilead in healing the current strife between native and immigrant. Even more important, compassionate evangelism may result not only in the salvation of the immigrant community, but also in the salvation of the American church. 🌐

*Compassionate  
immigrant  
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branding the  
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the preferences  
of the  
community.*



**SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ** is president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and the Hispanic National Association of Evangelicals, America's largest Hispanic faith Christian organization serving and representing over 34,000 member churches.







**COMPASSION MINISTRY:**  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD


# HELPING FAMILIES IN CRISIS

► BY **ROBERT MICHELS**

Consider these suggestions on how a church can be involved in the restoration of families, single moms, and the lives of children through adoption/foster care.



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**M**y greatest joy of involvement in a compassion ministry for 20 years is witnessing the mercy our Lord applies to broken families, relationships, and individuals. In my involvement with Highlands Child Placement Services and Maternity Home, I cannot count the times the first words from a caller were, "My daughter is pregnant," or "A girl in our church is pregnant." Parents and family members call because they do not know where to turn for help. Pastors call and ask for materials and advice to share with a family. At times, the pregnant girl will call because she may not have anyone to whom she can talk.

A mother from Colorado was distraught over her pregnant teenager. She believed this pregnancy would ruin not only her daughter's life, but also the family. Fast-forward 7 months. The girl's parents came for family counseling. At one point the mother began to weep and blurted out that she had kept a secret for years — not only from her husband, but from other family members as well. She too had been pregnant as a teen and placed her baby for adoption. The whole family gathered arm in arm and began to cry. With the truth finally out, the family broke a generational pattern.

In the U.S., we are now facing rising abortion rates since their decline in the early nineties. Pregnancy among single women is also increasing. The percentage of births to unwed mothers increased in the U.S. from 18.4 percent in 1980 to 40.6 percent by 2008.<sup>1</sup> In 2007, 60 percent of births to women ages 20-24 were nonmarital, up from 52 percent in 2002.<sup>2</sup> Added to an overwhelmed foster-care system, plus a decrease in the number of U.S. adoptions, the church needs to look at its ministry to these publics.

### Teen Pregnancy

The ages vary for those who become pregnant out of wedlock. The oldest woman to seek help through Highlands was 47. The youngest was 12. Just over 50 percent of the girls entering Highlands Maternity Home are between 15 and 19.

The church tends to glorify a girl's choice for life after it overcomes its fear that a pregnant teen will have an abortion. But merely providing proper care, nutrition, counseling, clothes, etc., for a single mom and her baby is akin to fueling a ship and sending it to sea without a captain. Sooner or later the ship will run aground and all will be lost.

Jesus provides a model for how the church

can help teens choose life for their unborn child. When Jesus encountered the demoniac in Mark 5, He did not simply hand him food and clothing. Jesus discerned the demoniac's spiritual need, and after He met the need, the man became a functioning member of society.

Pregnant teens walk into pregnancy centers or maternity homes to receive immediate help with physical needs, but not necessarily spiritual help. The anemic spiritual condition of the baby's mother, father, and family is often the reason why the teens become pregnant in the first place.

Teen pregnancy is an emotional roller coaster for the family, even distant relatives. Everyone seems to have a solution concerning what is best for the pregnant teen. Often the teen's family has been dysfunctional for years and must now focus its energy on the young girl's pregnancy.

Young girls often intentionally get pregnant in an attempt to secure the fantasy relationship that has eluded them. That relationship is a deep-seated need for love and affection from their father. If the father denies the relationship of love and affection, the young girl will often come by it through whatever means necessary.

As a church, we need to help families overcome their dysfunction. We have seen the cycle of dysfunction broken when we minister to the spiritual needs of the girls who come to us. Girls leave Highlands to pursue the path God intends for them. Many attend Bible college; others leave Highlands, return home, and marry a youth pastor.

Except in rare cases, the cost to effectively operate residential ministries is mostly prohibitive for churches. Churches can, however, refer girls to residential maternity care ministries and adoption agencies that provide biblical solutions. Traditionally, these parachurch outreaches exist at the national, regional, and district levels.





### Single Mothers

The single mother in 2012 may not resemble that of the teen single mother of the last 30 years living on welfare. Celebrities glamorize unwed motherhood. Many single moms are better educated and better able to support themselves, so marriage is no longer a financial prerequisite.

In 2009, approximately 34 percent of U.S. children lived with a single parent, triple the

rate in 1970.<sup>3</sup> Nationally, 83 percent of children in single-parent families live with a single mom.<sup>4</sup> According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, 59 percent of American children will live in a single-parent home at least once during their minor years.

Some single-parent families are binuclear; both parents are actively involved in parenting and have created two separate homes for their children. Divorce and remarriage, rather

## CASA: HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SHATTERED BY ABUSE OR VIOLENCE



istockphoto

**C**hild abuse and neglect is a growing national problem, overwhelming the social service system. As a result, there are too many children in foster care and not enough workers to give them personalized attention. In some areas, a caseworker or a juvenile officer carry a caseload of 100 to 200 children.

One of the best-known agencies for helping abused children and families is CASA — Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children. CASA has more than 1,000 programs throughout the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Canada. These organizations are also called: ProKids, Voices for Children, Child Advocates, and GAL (Guardian ad Litem).

When someone reports abuse or neglect to police or through a hotline call, an ensuing investigation often removes children from their homes and places them into the foster-care system. Once in foster care, the court assigns system professionals to serve on a team for the child. This team usually includes a caseworker, a deputy juvenile officer, and an attorney.

CASA volunteers work one-on-one with children. The volunteers' main role is to 1) learn about the children's current needs, 2) share that information with the judge and other team members to ensure the proper services are provided, 3) make a recommendation to the judge about the child's future placement, and 4) be an ongoing source of support and encouragement to children while they are in transition.

Generally, CASA assigns volunteers to only one child or sibling group at a time. Volunteers spend on average about 2 hours a week in this role. Typical activities include visiting the child at least 1 hour (at home, school, daycare, or in other settings), and communicating with the child's family members and

other system professionals via phone or e-mail.

Most children in foster care are young (75 percent of children entering foster care in 2010 were 3 years or younger<sup>1</sup>). The trauma of abuse or neglect can cause major disruption for children. For that reason, CASA volunteers monitor the child's physical, emotional, and educational needs, and make appropriate recommendations to ensure these needs are met on a timely basis.

**CASA volunteers monitor the child's physical, emotional, and educational needs, and make appropriate recommendations to ensure these needs are met.**

To qualify as a child advocate, CASA requires volunteers to complete a 30-hour training course, undergo a background check, and make a commitment to stay on a case until it closes. Volunteers must be at least 21 years old and have a clean background.

Being a CASA volunteer opens doors for a lifelong impact on children. As one foster child said, "To give a child a CASA volunteer is to give them a voice. To give them a voice is to give them hope."

While CASA is not a religious organization, many of its volunteers are Christians. They see the child advocacy role as an opportunity to share the gospel. Steve Edney, a CASA volunteer in Springfield, Missouri, was able to share his faith with his appointed foster child. "A lot of it is me giving my testimony of God's faithfulness as we learn about each other," says Edney. "Once a relationship is built, I help by letting them know there is something solid to lean on in hard times. It comes out gradually over time in different conversations without any pressure."

The teen boy on Edney's CASA case accepted Christ last summer.

Edney says there is freedom to share your faith with people you come in contact with, including caseworkers, juvenile officers, counselors, and lawyers. "When you do a good job, they respect you and it opens up doors."

To learn more, go to [casaforchildren.org](http://casaforchildren.org).

— **DAN PRATER**, former communications director for CASA, Springfield, Missouri

### NOTE

1. 2010 Report from the Greene County, Missouri Juvenile Courts



than being the exception or aberration, are more common in single-parent families.

Single parents come from all social classes, all racial and ethnic groups, and all age groups. However, single, female-headed households tend to experience more financial burdens than single, male-headed households.

Some single mothers, especially adult children of divorced parents, remain single because they do not want their offspring to

suffer the pain of watching a parent leave. Other women become single mothers as a result of abandonment, not choice.

The prevalence of single-parent families is a concern because single parents and their children may suffer emotional stress, economic need, and social disadvantages. Is it possible for one parent to raise children successfully? What are some challenges facing single-parent families? How can a Christian

*As a church,  
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families overcome  
their dysfunction.*

**O**ne Sunday in fall 2008, my assistant walked into my office looking very distraught. A new boy in childcare exposed himself to the girls in his class. My response was immediate, "Bring him to my office and go find his parents."

As I waited, I pictured an ill-behaved, undisciplined child. I contemplated what my response would be for his despicable behavior. I was not prepared for what I was about to encounter, nor did I anticipate that this would change my heart forever.

Minutes later, Tristan, a tiny, meek boy, stepped quietly into my office. He was not the gruff, disrespectful bully I had expected. The night before, Missouri Children's Division had rescued him from an abusive home. After only 5 short years of life, he was emotionally and physically marred by the cruel and inhuman acts of abuse he had experienced.

Sadly, this story is not uncommon. The statistics are staggering:

- There are 114,556 orphans in the United States waiting to be adopted.
- There are 423,773 children in the United States foster-care system today.

The growing numbers of displaced children are overwhelming state systems. The National Adoption Attitudes Survey found that 40 percent of adults, or 81.5 million Americans, have considered adopting. If just one in 500 of these adults adopted, every child in foster care would have a permanent family.

The night I met Tristan, God began to stir my heart. I felt Him calling me to make a difference in the lives of children like Tristan. In January 2009, we launched the Cherish Kids program with a three-fold mission:

1. To raise awareness of the needs of displaced children through media, church connections, and community events. We do this by:
  - hosting Cherish Kids Expos and the annual Cherish Kids 5K; participating in community events, and partnering with churches by providing information on foster care, adoption, and support opportunities.
  - using promotional media campaigns through billboards, radio and TV commercials, our website, and social sites.
2. To provide resources regarding foster care, adoption, and other opportunities for involvement by:
  - providing accurate information on foster care/adoption training and licensing classes.
  - providing information on domestic and international adoption options.
  - connecting individuals/families with information regarding children who are currently available for adoption.
  - providing child sponsorship opportunities.
3. To offer support to individuals, families, community organizations, and churches, along with state and local offices by:
  - offering emotional encouragement and support through the Cherish Kids volunteer team.
  - providing financial assistance for foster care/adoption families.
  - providing immediate needs through the Cherish Kids Children's Essentials & Clothing Shoppe.
  - providing a venue for hosting state classes and events.
  - hosting an annual Cherish Kids appreciation luncheon for Missouri State Division of Social Services staff.
  - offering church camp scholarships for foster/adopted children.

Through these efforts we are seeing God do amazing things. The church is responding to the cries of children and making a difference in their lives. Tristan is an example of how God is using Cherish Kids. A family adopted him and he is now part of a healthy, loving home.

There may be families in your church considering foster care or adoption. Look for ways your church can support them in ministering to neglected or abused children.

— **DEBBIE LINDELL**, director of Cherish Kids, James River Assembly of God, Ozark, Missouri



Photos.com

**CHERISH KIDS:  
HELPING FAMILIES  
WITH ADOPTION  
AND FOSTER  
CARE**



successfully raise children as a single parent? What role does the church play in ministering to these families?

### Child Abuse

How much physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse need a child suffer at the hands of a parent? When is it deemed prudent to remove

the child from the home and place the child in protective custody? This eventually lands the abused child in a foster-care system that is neither an answer to the problem or a safety net.

A child should never suffer abuse on any level from any person, let alone a parent. The child should be removed from the home when it is in the best interest of the child, as

## THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE CYCLE OF INCARCERATION



**In the U.S. today, 2.3 million individuals — one in every 100 adults — are behind bars.** As staggering as these numbers are, they lead to an even more significant problem — the number of children who have a parent in prison.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, about 2.7 million U.S. children have lost a parent to incarceration. Life for children of inmates can be extremely difficult. They not only mourn the loss of a parent (much like they would mourn a death), they also face the stigma within the community that comes with being children of inmates. Children are often unable to shake the negative affects this stigma has on their lives. Many experience

poverty, difficulty concentrating in school, and abuse. People often cast aside these children as hopeless and write them off as troublemakers. In addition, a high percentage of these children end up in foster care, which separates them from family, friends, and familiar things. As a result, researchers expect up to 70 percent of these children will be incarcerated. If this statistic holds true, the generational cycle of incarceration will continue to negatively affect many of our nation's families.

The church has a mandate to reach out to these families. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27). The church's ministry to widows and orphans must include those temporarily widowed and orphaned by incarceration.

In 2004, Assemblies of God Chaplaincy Department formed Shapes Mentoring Program to work with children of inmates to combat the cycle of incarceration. This ministry partners with churches to provide caring adult mentors to

children of inmates living in southwest Missouri. As a result of this ministry, the children of inmates receive a friend and a role model who helps them realize they can have a future that does not include prison. This ministry has seen great success and will soon be expanded to communities throughout the U.S.

Mentoring children of inmates is not the only way a church can minister to these families. Churches can partner with Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree program to provide children of inmates in their area with Christmas gifts and summer church camping. This is a way to show them the love of Christ in a tangible non-threatening way.

**Too often churches shy away from or shun families affected by incarceration, sending the message that the people of God are not interested in loving or supporting them.**

Mentoring programs also exist for parents when they return home from prison. These programs connect ex-offenders with Christian mentors that can guide former inmates as they return home, seek employment, and look for a church home.

The greatest thing the church can do is to accept families affected by incarceration. Too often churches shy away from or shun these individuals, sending the message that the people of God are not interested in loving or supporting them.

Become a faith community that is willing to come alongside a family in need. Care for the parent left behind, and show love and acceptance to a child who is scared and confused by his family's situation. Be willing to allow a former inmate to feel loved and at home at your church.

If the church can show the love of God to these families in crisis, we will begin to see our nation's incarceration numbers decrease. We will also see an increase in the number of families coming to our churches and ultimately coming to know the love of God.

For more information visit:

- [www.shapesmentoring.org](http://www.shapesmentoring.org) (mentoring children of inmates)
- [www.jerichocommission.org](http://www.jerichocommission.org) (mentoring ex-offenders)
- [www.angeltree.org](http://www.angeltree.org) (providing Christmas gifts to the children of inmates)

— **JEFFREY B. DORN, D.Min.**, program director, Shapes Mentoring Program, Springfield, Missouri

### NOTE

1. "The Economic Mobility Project and The Public Safety Performance Project." *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*. Washington, D.C.: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010.

long as there are capable, loving, caring families to ease the hurt.

Churches need to be aware of their legal responsibility in reporting child abuse.<sup>5</sup> Child-abuse laws vary by state. Parenting classes can be a proactive way of teaching parenting skills and preventing child abuse. Having a marriage/parenting mentoring program is another way to strengthen parenting skills.

Court Appointed Special Advocates is a program in which church members can become involved. Judges appoint CASA volunteers to advocate for the safety and well-being of children who have been removed from their homes due to parental abuse and neglect. Visit [www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org) for more information and to find a chapter in your area. (See sidebar "CASA: Helping Children and Families Shattered by Abuse or Violence," page 74.)

### Adoption/Foster Care

"Orphanages were the primary way of caring for indigent or unwanted children in the USA from the mid-19th century into the mid-20th century. After that, foster homes and small institutions like group homes replaced orphanages."<sup>6</sup> Contrary to common belief that orphanages were bad, "Orphanages were generally created by communities to improve the life chances of the children in their care and, by and large, did just that."<sup>7</sup>

Years ago, to deal with the burgeoning number of orphans or abused/neglected children, the federal government began placing children with foster families. Many private orphanages shut down or changed their mission to receive abused and battered children. The practice of placing children in foster homes/care is still in place today. For the most part it works.

James instructs: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). There are more than 163 million orphans in the world today. Even in the U.S. there are almost half a million children in foster care. Many of these have been abused, neglected, or abandoned. The Bible speaks of them as the fatherless. The church needs to play a major role in developing families to fill a void in fostering and adopting children. (See sidebar "Cherish Kids," page 75.)

Here are eight suggestions on how a

church can be involved in the restoration of families, single moms, and the lives of children through adoption/foster care.

### Pray for Wisdom and Direction

Pray the Lord will direct your church in how it should be involved in the adoption/foster-care process. I have seen people donate a house or a building to a church, and immediately the church thinks of a maternity home or pregnancy center. This scenario normally ends in failure. Study God's Word to see what it says about the fatherless. Learn about children in your local foster-care system and the needs they have. Ask God to help you minister to unwed mothers, single parents, and families who are foster parents.

### Attain Knowledge of Adoption/Foster Care

Educate yourself on local and state laws regarding foster care, adoption, and underage pregnancy. Abiding by these laws will give your ministry legitimacy in the public eye. Reject the



*The church needs to play a major role in developing families to foster and adopt children.*





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urge, however, to accept state or federal funds. Doing so will free you to proclaim Christ.

#### **Gain Compassion**

Compassion for the betterment of families must be the church's primary motivation. If it is not, the church will suffer from compassion burnout when adversity comes and you see the hopelessness of so many individuals.

#### **Show Support**

Even if you do not have the means to begin an adoption/foster care ministry, realize that others in your community are probably doing this type of work. Whether it is in your community or national ministries, support them. Send financial contributions, take part in work days, volunteer, and encourage others to become involved.

#### **Take a Missions Trip**

Arrange a missions trip to a children's home or maternity/pregnancy center. A missions trip will help people in your church obtain

a perspective on dysfunctional families. It may also open doors for volunteer ministry by members of your church.

#### **Encourage Adoption/Foster Care**

The Bible is clear that parenting is a two-parent job with both the mother and father providing a protective umbrella over a child. Encourage families to become involved in the state/local foster-care system.

#### **Counseling/Classes**

If your church encourages families to adopt/foster children, you will need counseling, classes, and a support team for these families.

#### **The Forgotten**

Many foster children and single unwed mothers come from broken families that were once churched or professing Christians. Broken, dysfunctional families need restoration. The task of the church is not only to redeem messed-up families, but also to recognize the symptoms of their dysfunction and work

to alleviate problems before the family is beyond repair.

As you become involved in the ministry of foster care, abused/battered, and single-mom care, you are showcasing the gospel to an unbelieving society. Your church's investment will impact lives beyond your lifetime. 🌱

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**ROBERT MICHELS**, administrator, Assemblies of God Family Services Agency, Hot Springs, Arkansas

*The task  
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COMPASSION MINISTRY:  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC: *Who Will Cry for Me?*

► BY JOANN BUTRIN

**L**anni lay still in his hospital bed. He could almost feel his body destroying itself. *I wonder when I will die*, he thought. *How much longer will it be? Where will I go? What will it feel like?* Then the thought came again and again, *I wonder who will cry for me?* A tear slid down his cheek as he found no answers to the questions that haunted his long days and sleepless nights.

Lanni is a young man with AIDS. He is in a part of the world where anti-AIDS drugs are unavailable. He will die. Who will answer his questions? Will he take his last breath thinking his life had no meaning and no one will notice his passing? Will he die without hope

for life after death?

Lanni's questions do have answers. However, few messengers seem willing to take the eternal message of Christ's love and peace to persons dying with AIDS.

When is the last time you thought about





Stockphoto

Few messengers seem willing to take the eternal message of Christ's love and peace to persons dying with HIV/AIDS. How will you respond?

someone with HIV/AIDS? Most likely it is not on your radar screen unless someone near you is affected by it. Yet, how many people like Lanni are in your community? How many relatives of people like Lanni are in your community or even your church?<sup>1</sup>

It is estimated that 33 million people are living with HIV/AIDS. Last year nearly 2 million people died of the dreaded disease. The estimated number of children living with HIV increased to 2.5 million in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

The HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to snuff out the lives of people far too young to die. It continues to ravage entire communities, wiping out those who are able to work, bear children, or continue a family name. Economies

are continuing to decline.

Sub-Saharan Africa still bears an inordinate share of the global HIV burden. Although the rate of new HIV infections has decreased, the total number of people living with HIV continues to rise. In 2009, that number reached 22.5 million, 68 percent of the global total. Sub-Saharan Africa has more women than men living with HIV. The estimated 1.3 million people who died of HIV-related illnesses in sub-Saharan Africa in 2009 comprised 72 percent of the global total of 1.8 million deaths attributable to the epidemic.<sup>3</sup>

Only about 42 percent of the estimated 33 million people living with HIV have access to life-prolonging drugs. Though the overall numbers of newly infected people are declining, the pandemic continues to garner worldwide attention.

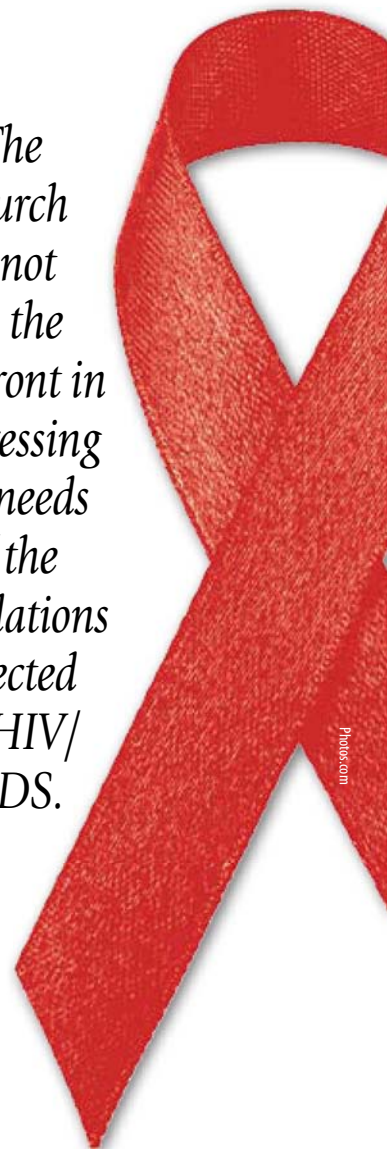
When you read Lanni's story, did you think, *This is happening somewhere else?* Yes, Africa is the hardest hit and continues to struggle with the deadly disease. Latin America and the Caribbean continue to have a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. India, China, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Asia are seeing an increase of HIV in certain populations. The Pacific Island of Papua New Guinea has an increasing epidemic as well. But AIDS is also here in the U.S. Researchers estimate that 1.5 million people in the U.S. in 2008 were living with HIV/AIDS. There were 26,000 deaths due to AIDS in 2008. Researchers also estimate that 56,000 people were newly infected with HIV in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

### Why the Concern About AIDS?

When you consider other debilitating illnesses and the vast number of those who die from these conditions, you might think, *Why the concern about AIDS?* The statistics on HIV/AIDS are impossible to comprehend. Every day 8,000 people die from AIDS. Every 6.4 seconds, someone is infected with HIV (World Health Organization statistics). Treatment with antiretroviral medications (ART) does not cure AIDS, but it has greatly extended the life expectancy of people in the U.S. living with HIV/AIDS.

Unfortunately, there is an apparent lack of urgency in the church's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Rather than urgency, we could better describe our responses as complacency, apathy, and denial.

*The church is not on the forefront in addressing the needs of the populations affected by HIV/AIDS.*



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*Sadly, the church continues to ignore vast opportunities for ministry to HIV-infected persons.*

### **Why the Church Is Absent**

The church is not on the forefront in addressing the needs of the populations affected by HIV/AIDS. Even prior to the widespread use of antiretroviral drugs, when many people were dying horrific deaths from AIDS, mostly secular groups offered care. Churches were noticeably absent. The church may not be present in this crisis for three main reasons.

#### **The stigma of AIDS**

The first reason for the church's lack of response to those with AIDS is the stigma connected with it. We typically brand people with HIV/AIDS as homosexuals, drug abusers, or sexually promiscuous. We judge their actions. We believe they are getting what they deserve. Such an attitude builds barriers and feeds fear, condemnation, even hatred. It certainly does not facilitate cooperation, caring, helping, and healing.

#### **Fear and ignorance**

A second reason is a fear of becoming infected and/or a fear of the unknown. Though education about the transmission of HIV/AIDS and the impossibility of becoming infected by casual contact is widespread, many people believe there are unknown issues we do not fully understand about the illness. They are reluctant to be close to anyone with this stigma-laden disease. Recently, a study in

England among young people showed that although they are informed about how HIV is transmitted, 73 percent of the young persons said they would not drink from the same glass as someone who is HIV positive.<sup>5</sup>

Since most ministry situations involve casual contact with persons with AIDS, there is no risk of acquiring the disease when offering help, comfort, and spiritual care. HIV is not spread by:

- shaking hands, touching, or hugging.
- kissing on the cheek. (Lip kissing is thought to be safe, too.)
- using the same eating utensils.
- riding in a crowded bus or car.
- swimming or bathing together.
- being in the same room.
- bites from mosquitoes or insects.

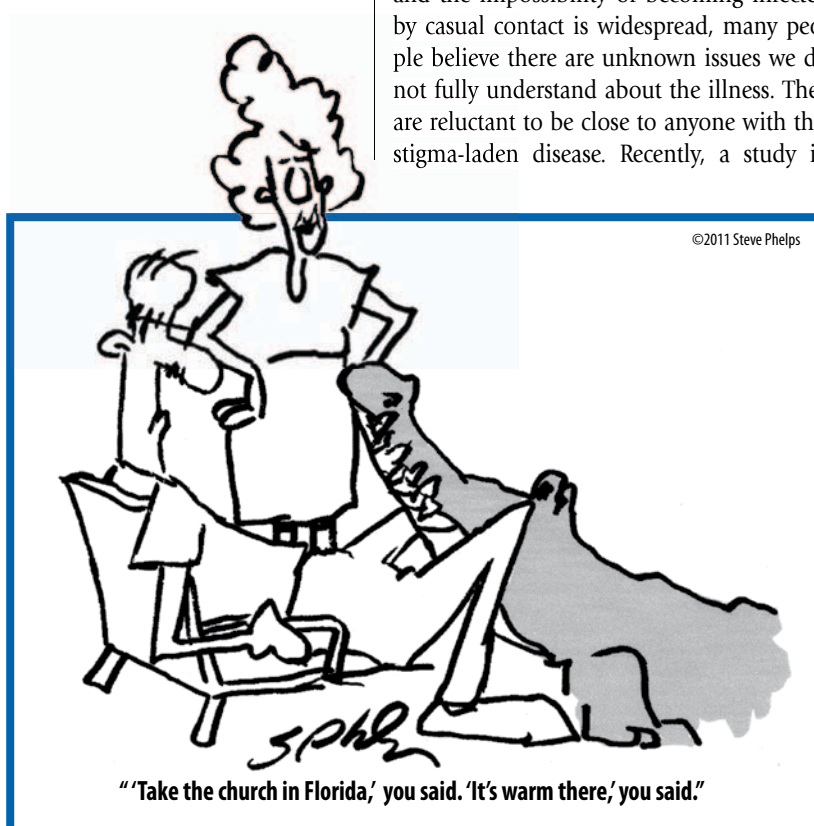
Researchers find highest concentrations of HIV in blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk of infected persons. Though researchers have found small amounts of HIV in other body fluids, such as saliva and tears, it is not in high enough concentrations to cause infection. Research has never shown that these body fluids transmit AIDS.

HIV is transmitted from one person to another by:

- sexual intercourse with a person infected with HIV.
- an injection with an HIV-contaminated needle (also contaminated dental equipment).
- circumcision or piercings from an HIV-contaminated knife or needle.
- receiving a blood transfusion or blood product that contains HIV.
- an HIV-infected mother giving birth to a baby who may then be infected before or during birth.
- breast-feeding from an HIV-infected mother.

In North America, the most common way HIV is spread is through sexual contact and sharing intravenous needles.

Most people are not comfortable discussing the possibilities of death and would rather avoid the discussion than confront the realities. Howard Mueller, in *AIDS: A Christian Response*, says, "When reality is too threatening for our minds and emotions to handle, we instinctively turn off, avoid, deny, or claim that the truth is exaggerated or wholly false."



### Judgmental attitudes

The third reason the church may not be present in the HIV/AIDS crisis is its judgmental attitude. When the crisis was first discovered in the U.S., it was most predominant among male homosexuals. People quickly labeled HIV/AIDS a homosexual disease. Many evangelicals believe the disease is punishment from God. A statement made by a church member summarizes this belief: "Why are you interfering with the punishment God has chosen to give these people?"

If we accept the theory of God's punishment, how is it that:

- female homosexuals, or lesbians, rarely contract AIDS?
- innocent children and others are infected with the HIV virus through blood transfusions and contaminated equipment?
- God directs His punishment only to male homosexuals and intravenous drug users?

These reasons and others cause many Christians to step back from offering compassion and spiritual care. Sadly, the church continues to ignore vast opportunities for ministry to HIV-infected persons who are in dire need of hope and healing in Christ. Pastors and church members must come to terms with past and current attitudes that create barriers between them and individuals needing help. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. Asking for forgiveness for negative and even hateful attitudes may be necessary. Ask for God's help to love those who appear different. They are God's precious creation in need of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the welcoming arms of the body of Christ.

Think of persons infected with HIV/AIDS as ordinary individuals who have a terminal disease. People with a terminal illness wish others would think of them as normal. An HIV-infected person may feel that a pastor or chaplain will not accept them due to their past (and possible present) lifestyle. The church must do all it can to change this perception.

### Why Should We Be Involved?

Do churches and individual believers in Christ have a moral imperative to respond to a crisis of this magnitude? Yes.

### Christ's concern

Jesus did not reserve His ministry to those who were like Him or believed as He did. He reached out to social outcasts, the rich, and sinners. He did not say that only those who were acceptable and worthy in His sight would receive His healing touch.

The account of Jesus' contact with the woman of Samaria in John 4 shows the way in which He dealt with those who society had stigmatized. Jesus' association with the Samaritan woman was scandalous in His day. Jews and Samaritans did not speak to each other. This woman was not only of an untouchable ethnic background, she was also living with a man to whom she was not married. Jesus talked to her about her life and the "living water" He had to offer her. John 4:39 says that many Samaritans believed in Him because of the testimony of this woman.

Jesus commanded His followers to "love your neighbor as yourself." In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus shows what it means to love our neighbors: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man in need?" asked Jesus.

"The one who had mercy on him," observed the expert in the Law.

Jesus' reply was powerful: "Go and do likewise." Jesus commands Christians, as recipients of the grace and love of God, to reach out to those in need — those who are suffering, sick, helpless, and alone. In the Great Commission, Jesus told His disciples to take the good news to all creation and to heal the sick in the name of Jesus (Mark 16:15-18). Persons dying with AIDS are suffering, alone, isolated, searching for answers, and in need of Christ's love, peace, hope, and forgiveness. Who better to bring them Jesus than those of us who have experienced His love, peace, hope, and forgiveness firsthand?

### Our responsibility

Compassion for those in need is not an add-on task for those who are in Christ or for the church as a Kingdom organism. It is the essence of the church. To be incarnational is to be truly compassionate about the needs of others.

Persons infected with HIV or who have AIDS are in desperate need of physical and spiritual caregivers who can compassionately

*Persons infected with HIV or who have AIDS are in desperate need of physical and spiritual caregivers who can compassionately assist them to live positively during the process of dying.*







## KEYS TO EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

- People need to come to terms with their theology of suffering and healing. Examine the suffering of Job (Job 1–42); Jesus (Matthew 26:38–46); and Paul (2 Corinthians 11–12).
- Recognize that a miracle of healing can be present or eternal. Scripture invites the body of Christ to anoint with oil and pray for the sick (James 5:4–16). At the same time Paul gives encouragement to seek eternal healing, which is eternal life (2 Corinthians 5:2; Philippians 1:20,21).
- If the patient is not a Christian, practice loving the sinner regardless of his lifestyle. Jesus modeled this when He ministered to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:40–43); the woman who worked as a prostitute (Luke 7:36–48); and the adulterous woman (John 4:1–26).
- Seek appropriate timing for conversations that deal with salvation and spirituality. Jesus stands at the door of each person's heart waiting for individuals to respond to His offer of salvation.
- Provide assurance that God is present even when there is pain and suffering.

assist them to live positively during the process of dying. The secular world speaks of the need for persons suffering from AIDS to be able to die with dignity. Christians know that only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ can people find hope, true comfort, and peace. What an opportunity for pastors and the community of Christians to be able to share the love of Christ with someone searching and in need of His redeeming grace.

The church cannot turn its back on persons with AIDS or their families. They are broken and in desperate need of a relationship with a caring community.

### Offering Spiritual Care

#### Getting started

Most people with HIV/AIDS have a desire for spiritual help. When death is imminent, many people wish to reexamine their spiritual condition and want the assurance of life after death or a connection with a supernatural being.

Before we can effectively minister to someone with HIV/AIDS, we must:

- examine our own attitudes about persons whose lifestyle is different from ours.
- understand our own reactions to HIV/AIDS and seek the Lord for help in lessening negative views.
- comprehend the opportunity to see Christ's love in action through His eyes.
- know that God intends the church to be a safe place where open doors of invitation and acceptance are extended to those with HIV/AIDS.
- expect the power of God to transform the lives of those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Individuals with a terminal disease, regardless of their religious persuasion or belief system, will face thoughts of what will happen after they die. Although they may not be ready to discuss spiritual matters, they will most certainly have thoughts about their final destiny.

### Provide spiritual companionship

**Presence:** The most valuable gift we have to offer is the ministry of presence. This involves coming alongside a person who is dying, symbolic of the Holy Spirit, who functions in this role daily.

**Laughter:** Recognize the important role of laughter and play in spiritual care for the terminally ill. This can be a useful tool until the

end of life. "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

**Facilitate spiritual growth:** The goal of spiritual care is to encourage growth until the end of life. The fruit of the Spirit: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23) are evident even in weakness of body.

**Encourage reminiscing:** The patient's story reflects the essence of their spirituality. Often, it is through telling one's story that unfinished business emerges, and thus creates a safe atmosphere for emotional and spiritual healing.

**Create a sacred place:** A sacred place may be as simple as a place to keep a Bible or personal journal; it can be a separate room with music, favorite books, or other sacred objects. Learn to be quiet and lead a person into reflective prayer. Do not fear silence.

**Honor spiritual rituals and traditions:** When assessing the spiritual needs of patients, ask what spiritual or religious rituals have been or are meaningful to them. These may include: Communion, water baptism, Scripture reading, worship music, Christian meditation, prayer, community celebration (a circle of friends or family at bedside), anointing with oil.

**Discuss spiritual needs:** Sometimes the fervor to see someone come into a relationship with Christ causes caregivers and Christians to force a discussion about spiritual matters before a person is ready. Those who have faith in Jesus Christ desire to share their faith. However, they must be sensitive and think of the other person. We must keep both the timing and the readiness of the person to discuss these issues in focus. But there comes a time when we need to tell him about the love of Jesus and His offer of salvation.

### Practical Ministry Helps for Persons With AIDS

In addition to providing spiritual care to the HIV-infected person, ministry includes reaching out in practical ways to demonstrate personal concern and the love of Christ.

AIDS patients have a great need for relationship and support. Unfortunately, family members and friends may reject or shun them in their time of greatest need. Even health professionals may hold them at a distance. This increases the patient's feelings of isolation and aloneness. Spending time with AIDS victims





## THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC: WHO WILL CRY FOR ME? (continued from page 84)

is important, and developing a friendship with them allows them to freely speak of their fears.

As the AIDS disease becomes increasingly incapacitating, activities of daily living may become difficult or impossible to accomplish. The following are ways a church can provide practical ministry to AIDS victims:

- Help with business matters
- Provide meals
- Care for their property
- Provide childcare
- Run errands
- Provide transportation to the doctor and/or pharmacy

### Support groups

One of the most effective ways the church can offer ministry to individuals and families dealing with HIV/AIDS is to organize a support group. Churches that do not have enough people to form a support group can work with other churches in the community to form a group. The shared experience of a support group gives both hope and stability to victims and their families.

### Conclusion

In the opening story to this article, Lanni wondered if anyone would cry for him. Fortunately, someone did. A local pastor and his wife began visiting Lanni in the hospital. They hovered near Lanni's bed as he slipped closer and closer to death. Tears flowed freely down their cheeks as they watched his life ebb away. Watching Lanni's physical deterioration had been horrible, yet watching his spiritual development and the realization of his hope in Christ had been glorious.

I hope a renewed sense of being the instrument of Christ to bring hope, healing, and compassion to HIV/AIDS victims will fill the hearts of those reading this article. Jesus said, "Let your light shine

before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). ☺

### NOTES

1. Portions of this article are adapted from AGWM publications on AIDS.
2. Statistics are taken from UNAIDS REPORT ON THE GLOBAL AIDS EPIDEMIC 2010. [www.unaids.org/documents/20101123\\_GlobalReport\\_Chap2\\_em.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/documents/20101123_GlobalReport_Chap2_em.pdf). Figures represent the middle range of the estimated numbers of people who have HIV/AIDS. Accessed April 12, 2011.
3. Ibid.
4. UNAIDS Global Facts and Figures. [www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/dataimport/pub/factsheet/2009/20091124\\_fs\\_global\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/dataimport/pub/factsheet/2009/20091124_fs_global_en.pdf). Accessed April 12, 2011.
5. [www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/216939.php](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/216939.php). Accessed April 12, 2011.

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Photos accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.



## GLOBAL AIDS PARTNERSHIP

**The Global AIDS Partnership (GAP)** of Assemblies of God World Missions has developed AIDS awareness and intervention using Engage the Church, a resource toolkit for churches. This kit provides start-up ideas for getting all age groups of the church involved in hands-on activities and prayer regarding the HIV/AIDS crisis. Sermon ideas and opportunities are available to learn more about the epidemic. All of the resources from GAP are available as free downloads from [www.globalaidspartnership.org](http://www.globalaidspartnership.org). The GAP office also has ideas for participation in World AIDS Day, which takes place December 1 each year.



**JOANN BUTRIN, Ph.D.**, is director of International Ministries for Assemblies of God World Missions, Springfield, Missouri.







**COMPASSION MINISTRY:**  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD



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# SEX TRAFFICKING *in a City Near You*

Sex trafficking is no longer just a horrible issue in other nations and continents. This horror has come home to America.

► BY A. ELIZABETH GRANT

**O**n September 9, 2010, a Missouri television station released a report detailing the arrest of four men from Southwest Missouri and one from St. Louis because of their participation in a commercial sex-trafficking conspiracy. Authorities charged them in an 11-count indictment for the sexual abuse and torture of a young, mentally deficient woman. The abuse occurred over the span of 5 years, ending only after EMTs took the victim to the hospital after she suffered cardiac arrest when her perpetrators suffocated and electrocuted her in a torture session.<sup>1</sup>

The wife of the primary exploiter later went on record to defend her husband, claiming the girl liked posing for pornographic photo shoots. She told authorities they had not forced her participation; it was consensual.

This woman's rationale says much more about how she, and perhaps parts of our American society, view reality and truth than about the victim herself. If someone has sexually violated and tortured a teen girl as a slave day after day for years — and also by men who pay to exploit her — does the fact she has learned it is useless to fight back justify the abusive actions of the adult men who held her captive? This is only one in a disturbing number of cases in America now coming to light. Sex trafficking is no longer just a horrible issue in other nations and continents. This horror has come home to America.

Over the last several years, the U.S. State

Department has estimated that traffickers in other countries are selling 17,000 to 18,000 women and children a year and bringing them into the United States for sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup> In addition, another report estimates that 100,000 American juveniles (with estimates as high as 300,000)<sup>3</sup> a year are being trafficked annually within our nation for the purposes of sexual exploitation. These numbers are staggering indicators of the number of lives of women and children being destroyed daily by sexual slavery within the United States. They also reveal another sobering reality: There are staggering numbers of men in America who are creating the demand for these sexual services.

Many men in America are living double lives in their hidden bondage to sexual addictions, including child pornography and pedophilia. Without this demand for enslaved women and children in America,




*Many men are living double lives in their hidden bondage to child pornography and pedophilia. Without this demand for enslaved women and children, there would not be a burgeoning sex market.*





## SEX TRAFFICKING: IN A CITY NEAR YOU (continued from page 89)



*istockphoto*

### Definition

**Sex trafficking** is the recruitment, transportation (within national or across international borders), transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking is accomplished by means of fraud, deception, threat of, or use of force, abuse of a position of vulnerability, and other forms of coercion (The Protection Project, "What is trafficking?")

**NOTE**  
1. The Paul H. Nitzsche School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, 2000.

there would not be a disturbing burgeoning sex market.

### How Is Sex Trafficking Flourishing in the United States?

Global sex trafficking tends to flow from the poorer nations — where poverty creates desperation — to the richer nations, where the affluent have money to buy and sell persons for sex. For this reason, trafficking victims generally come from poverty-stricken areas of Asia, Africa, Russian-speaking Europe, and Latin America. The receiving nations tend to be the more affluent nations of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Traffickers bring women and children into America through major cities on the East and West coasts, as well as through Mexico into the southern border states — California, Arizona, and Texas — in particular. They have "broken in" these women through gang rape, violence, and intimidation before arriving in the U.S. By the time these women arrive — often unable to speak English, traumatized through rape, and threatened should they try to run away — they easily disappear into the world of sexual slavery. Because illegal immigration has been such a volatile political topic, it was not until the last several

years that law enforcement began to realize that many women and children coming into the U.S. across borders are being brought under force against their wills for sexual exploitation.


### Why Won't Sex Trafficking Victims Go to the Police?

In many nations where people are trafficking women and children, should-be protectors have become predators. For example, one of the places in India where men are most likely to rape women is the police station. It is not unusual for police to hold young girls taken from brothels in a police raid for several days under international media or political pressure. After the cameras are gone, policemen violently rape the "rescued" girls and then return them to the brothels. For this reason, international trafficking victims do not turn to police for help when they arrive in America.

Sex trafficking is also flourishing in the U.S. because courts are more likely to punish criminals for selling drugs than selling innocent children. Laws put the burden of proof on victims as to whether they can prove they were "forced" into sexual activity rather than on the men who buy and prostitute them. Also, drug dealers can only sell drugs once; sex traffickers can sell a woman or child over and over. Sex trafficking, especially of children and minors, is becoming a very profitable industry in America.

The average age of young girls being trafficked into prostitution in the U.S. is 12-14 years of age.<sup>5</sup> Victims are frequently runaways, running to escape sexual violence and abuse at home or in abusive foster care homes. According to Sergeant Byron Fassett with the Dallas Police Department, a nationally recognized law enforcement expert on the issue of domestic minor sex trafficking, a history of sexual abuse seems to be one of the major contributing factors — why one child versus another child is more likely to become a victim of domestic minor sex trafficking.<sup>6</sup>

Pimps have radar for young, vulnerable teen girls on the street, who feel unloved and unvalued. They are willing to tell a girl everything she is emotionally hungry to hear. If someone has already abused her, she is willing to believe that this man "loves" her and will "take care of her." Sadly, like all



### PRACTICAL WAYS FOR THE CHURCH TO HELP TRAFFICKING VICTIMS

- Provide basic personal items and toiletries for rescued victims in a local shelter.
- Have qualified members of the congregation provide language translation for foreign trafficking victims and authorities.
- Offer volunteer medical and health personnel from the church to a clinic serving prostituted women and child victims of abuse.
- Report signs of child sex abuse/exploitation or exploitation of minors to authorities.
- Bring awareness of the trafficking issue in public schools to aid in prevention.
- Initiate a meeting of community church leaders and interested people of faith to prayerfully consider how to collaborate for awareness, prevention, and intervention in your city.
- Begin an outreach into an area of prostitution in your city or town, prayerfully building relationships and establishing the presence of Jesus there.
- Work with local authorities to start an aftercare shelter for trafficking survivors.
- Raids? Best left to law enforcement or agencies working with law enforcement. The church is most effective in doing what only the church can do ... bringing hope and healing through Jesus Christ and life-changing ministry to victims.

exploitation, pimps are lying. Sex trafficking begins with lies, pimps perpetuate it by lies, and it can end in violent death — all surrounded by lies.

In an extensive 2-year U.S. government-sponsored study of domestic trafficking in America (2008), researchers documented that pimps are selling America's children for sex not only on the streets, but also through Craigslist, and at truck stops across the nation.<sup>7</sup>

### What Is the Responsibility of the Church?

It is critical that the church become aware of the exploding trafficking issue in the United States and factors contributing to it. While the church has traditionally avoided sexually related issues, distorted sexual images and practices bombard both believers and nonbelievers in every area of American society. The church, through its age-appropriate ministries, has the opportunity to provide children, young people, and adults with healthy biblical perspectives on sexuality. If the church in 21st-century America does not address sexuality from God's perspective, church members will by default be enculturated into distorted cultural perspectives on male-female sexuality. These contributing factors include easy access to pornography, the sexualization of children — especially young girls — an acceptance of violence toward women, and a glamorization of pimp and prostitute culture. These trends create fertile ground for sex trafficking of women and children in America.

When churches create awareness among believers, the following practical steps for action and engagement become possible.

**Prevention:** By including the topic of sexuality and the injustice/danger of sex trafficking in Christian education curriculum for upper elementary children, middle school, and high schoolers, the church is helping forewarn young people to the dangers of trafficking. Middle school girls are especially vulnerable if they are unhappy at home, in an unhealthy home environment, or if someone has already sexually abused them as children.

Knowledge about trafficking framed in compassionate concern for young people within our churches and communities can open doors for dialogue with vulnerable children and teens, making potential victims less

at-risk for traffickers who want to victimize them. A healthy identity in Jesus Christ and understanding one's value as a child of God created for good purposes are the greatest deterrents to exploitation.

**Prayer and Intercession:** In Jesus' announced ministry mandate in Luke 4:18, His anointing not only included proclaiming the gospel but also for setting the captive free. As Pentecostal followers of Jesus, this is also the mission of the 21st-century church. However, the first step in helping men and women in sexual slavery — like any other kind of slavery — is for God's people to pray and intercede for those in bondage in our communities. Steps for strategic intercession include:

- Praying over the areas of our cities/communities where evil reigns. This includes known areas of prostitution and drug use.
- Beginning a prayer group in the church among women with a heart for sexually exploited women and children. We must precede all action related to spiritual bondage with intentional, intensive intercession. Vision, passion, discernment, workers, and empowerment flow out of prayer.
- Beginning a prayer group among men in the church for men who are exploiters and who are themselves in sexual bondage to pornography or sexual exploitation. Jesus came to bring freedom for both women and children who are being exploited through trafficking and for the men who exploit them — whose hearts are bound with evil.

**Research:** Investigate what others are already doing in your community in terms of sex trafficking. Learn what respected state or national secular or faith-based organizations are already doing. Inquire of law enforcement and social services to learn if and how trafficking is occurring within your city. Is your city a city of origin, transit, or destination for victims? Bring together those in your church who are employed in law enforcement, social services, public schools, counseling, medical workers, and legal professionals to get a clearer understanding of what is happening locally. Knowing what is happening and who is already helping victims or potential victims in your community



*Prayerfully  
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*Pimps are selling children for sex not only on the streets, but also through Craigslist and at truck stops across America.*

helps you understand how your church can help engage practically and share the hope and healing of Jesus Christ.

Note: Ruthless organized crime largely controls sex trafficking. You must precede any action to help victims with prayer, research, and dialogue with law enforcement professionals who work with this issue. Trafficking laws in America define how people can give help, so become aware of the legal issues surrounding your potential engagement with victims.

**Examine your hearts and attitudes as followers of Jesus:** As members of the body of Christ and a local church, prayerfully considering how to engage in ministry to those in sexual slavery requires us to examine our attitudes toward prostituted women and children. Do our attitudes reflect our culture's attitudes or the heart of Jesus?

As parents, teachers, social workers, medical personnel, counselors, middle school/youth pastors, here are questions to ask ourselves:

- If a young girl of age 10 or 11 looks promiscuous or highly sexualized, how did she get that way? Little girls are not born sexualized. If they look highly sexual as a minor, something has happened to make them see themselves as sexual. Sexual abuse is not their fault or responsibility. Do we naturally blame

the victim?

- Secular culture portrays child pornography as a victimless crime. How did a young girl come to be in front of the pornographer's camera? Who or what is keeping her there? How does it destroy her future?
- If a prostituted teen or woman comes to our church, will we welcome her in our hearts and community of faith on her journey to healing and deliverance? Or, will we reject her because of personal fear and judgment? Or, is our compassion conditional, based on how she ended up in a life of prostitution?

Jesus demonstrated compassion and forgiveness for all, including prostituted women and men who exploit them. Are we, as His followers, willing and ready to extend the same grace and opportunity for forgiveness and healing?

### **Why the Church Must Engage**

Several years ago an official with the U.S. State Department confidentially approached me. She shared her concern that the success rates for secular agencies working with trafficking victims in America were dismally low. For that reason, she stressed that the church must become engaged with helping trafficking victims if they are to experience any long-term hope and change.

**There is no full recovery, freedom, and hope from the trauma of sexual slavery without Jesus Christ.** Many good secular organizations in America are helping survivors with legal, medical, political, or social services. However, since sexual slavery is more than physical slavery — it devastates the spiritual, mental, and emotional dimensions of the person as well — only Jesus Christ can bring new life, healing of body, mind, and spirit, and a new beginning for victims. Through His love and liberating truth, Jesus can make a prostituted man, woman, or child a new creation, transforming their identity into one with value as created by God. "If any man [any woman] be in Christ, he [or she] is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV). Jesus' mission through His church is to take broken, exploited people and help them become strong, valued men



**Pastor Bertram realizes he should have read the contract more carefully before accepting his new position.**



and women of God.

**Restoration from sexual trauma is a healing journey.** This healing journey is best walked with patient people of faith who believe in God's work in the trafficking victim's life — people who believe in miracles and know that God is not willing that any should perish without Him. Sadly, what society offers in terms of victim services is often weeks long at best. Who better to walk with survivors of sexual exploitation than the community of faith who can pray, trust, and love on the healing journey? When social services stop, who will be there for survivors?

**In the evil darkness of sexual slavery, the light and love of Jesus Christ and His people shine most brightly.** A graphic description of a dark world of violence and injustice in Isaiah 59 is a frighteningly accurate portrayal of what is happening in areas of America's cities and even small towns. God's response to such violence and evil, however, was not avoidance but sending truth and salvation through His Son. God sent Jesus to invade the darkness of evil and redeem those in bondage to it.

In the same way, the church in America cannot allow the present darkness of sexual slavery and its related evils to intimidate it nor can the church ignore it. Rather, it is time for the church to challenge the darkness with the proclamation and engagement of Jesus Christ's love, power, and truth. As the church does, it will see God's raw grace at work as exploited men, women, and children find healing and freedom through Christ Jesus. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

**Helping trafficking victims requires an engagement of the whole gospel.** Sometimes we view ministry to those victimized by sexual exploitation strictly as compassion ministry or a humanitarian endeavor of the church. The truth is, helping victims of sexual exploitation find new life requires the whole

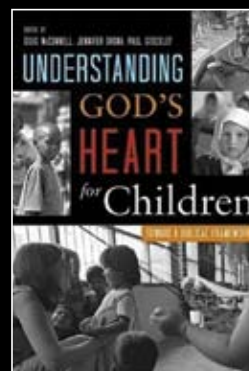
ministry to which Jesus has called the church: a transparent presentation of Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Healer integrated with Christ's compassion expressed in practical ways to survivors. An authentic integrated compassionate ministry will see men, women, boys, and girls find healing, be set free from sexual bondage, and become redeemed brothers and sisters in the community of faith.

**The Spirit-empowered church is uniquely equipped to facilitate healing for trafficking survivors.** Dark spiritual power is often evident in those who have experienced years of sexual exploitation, especially victims who have been subjected to religious rituals as a part of their bondage. As a result, it is the work of the Holy Spirit through His people in discernment, wisdom, healing, faith, and deliverance that is critically needed to help the sexually exploited find deliverance and freedom. May God give His church wisdom and courage to engage in this battle for freedom. 🙏

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Photos accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.



## RESOURCES FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING AWARENESS

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**A. ELIZABETH GRANT, Ph.D.**, is an executive presbyter of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri and founder of Project Rescue, an organization committed to rescuing and restoring girl victims of sex trafficking.



COMPASSION MINISTRY:  
EXPRESSING THE HEART OF GOD

# PRAYING FOR THE POOR

► INTERVIEW WITH **THOMAS E. TRASK**

Ken Horn

“  
As people pray  
and God bends  
their heart  
toward the poor,  
they want to put  
hands and feet to  
their prayers.”  
”

**I**n response to the disciples' criticism of the women who anointed Jesus' feet with oil, He replied, "The poor you will always have with you" (Matthew 26:11). This is just as true today as it was in Jesus' day. Today's media constantly bombard us with images of people who have been devastated by the various natural disasters around the globe. This increasing influx of videos and pictures often desensitizes us to the plight of those who are poor and suffering. We see the vastness of the need and wonder what we can do to even begin to alleviate that need.

While we might have limited financial resources to help those in need, and while we might not be able to travel to faraway places to provide a helping hand in meeting the needs of the poor, there is something

all of us can do — pray.

Hal Donaldson, president of Convoy of Hope, recently visited with Thomas E. Trask, former general superintendent of the Assemblies of God to discuss the Global Prayer Initiative.

**After stepping down as general superintendent, you had a wide range of ministry options, but you chose to make praying for the poor and suffering a primary focus. What led you to that decision?**

**TRASK:** Prayer has always been a major part of my life and ministry as a pastor and as general superintendent. I have always believed that nothing of eternal value is going to happen unless you undergird it with prayer. So, when Convoy of Hope presented the opportunity to chair the Global Prayer Initiative, I sought the Lord and sensed it was His leading.

Jesus commanded us to help the poor and suffering. One way we can minister to them is to pray for them. So many people are hurting physically and are lost spiritually. They need God's help.

**Why is praying for the poor and suffering important to a church?**

**TRASK:** Praying for the poor and suffering constantly reminds us that the church must reach beyond its walls. I believe one of the reasons God raised up Convoy of Hope was to be a reminder to churches that we must not neglect our God-given responsibility to care for the widow, orphan, and hungry. Pastors and churches need to pray that God will open their eyes to see the hurting, open their ears to hear their cries, open their hearts to extend compassion, and open their hands to meet their needs. Churches need an unselfish desire to serve others so people may see Christ.

I am blessed when I see churches taking hold of this message of Christ's compassion and expressing it in fresh and creative ways in their communities. The church that reaches out is a church that will experience God's favor. God is blessing Convoy of Hope because it focuses on blessing others.

For many who are poor and suffering, life appears hopeless. But as a result of faithful men and women who are committed to prayer, we are expecting and believing God for even more followers of Christ to join in our outreach to those in hopeless circumstances. As people pray for the poor and suffering what appears to be impossible will become possible, because God is in heaven and His power is at work in the world.

**What is the Global Prayer Initiative?**

**TRASK:** The Global Prayer Initiative is a movement to encourage and support prayer for the poor and suffering. Our mission is to educate, empower, and mobilize millions who are committed to pray for the poor and suffering. We are using the Internet, prayer summits, and partnerships with churches and ministries to accomplish this. We are also producing Christ-centered, biblically based resources that inspire and mobilize people to pray for the poor and suffering. We provide opportunities that integrate acts of compassion with prayer for the needy. We also are building a network that includes various prayer movements, compassion ministries, mission organizations, campus and youth ministries, denominations, churches, businesses, and individuals united in prayer for those in poverty.

The focus of the Global Prayer Initiative is to bring greater awareness to God's mandate to remember the poor. Pastors have received this message very well. We also encourage people to pray for Convoy of Hope. Specifically, we ask them to pray for the workers, food and supplies, financial resources, and the millions of people receiving help each year through the citywide outreaches, children's feeding programs, and disaster response efforts. We encourage people who have a burden for the poor and suffering to fast and pray every Tuesday at noon. We are finding that as people pray and God bends their heart toward the poor, they want to put hands and feet to their prayers and do something tangible.

**Part of the Global Prayer Initiative is the Pray for Hope Summit. Describe this prayer summit.**

**TRASK:** The Pray for Hope Summit is a two-day gathering of pastors and laypeople to pray for the poor and suffering. These summits take place in various cities around the country. We go to cities where pastors have invited us to come and hold a summit.

Each prayer summit has a similar agenda. Some include prayer walks through poorer neighborhoods. They all have times of strong intercession. Throughout the day, presenters challenge attendees from God's Word concerning prayer. Prayer leaders then lead people in praying for specific needs in the city

## HOW TO PRAY FOR THE POOR



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**Pray for God's Workers**  
(Matthew 9:35–38)

**Pray for God's Power**  
(Mark 9:22–29)

**Pray for God's Love**  
(Luke 10:33–37)

### Petitions for the Poor

Pray for:

Salvation (Luke 4:18)  
Justice (Psalm 140:12)  
Safety (Psalm 12:5)  
Water (Isaiah 41:17)  
Food (Proverbs 22:9)  
Shelter (Isaiah 25:4)  
Healthcare (Luke 10:34,35)  
Education  
(2 Timothy 3:15,16)  
Employment  
(1 Thessalonians 4:11,12)

— Excerpted from  
Thomas E. Trask and Randy Hurst,  
*God is Listening* (Springfield,  
Missouri: The Access Group, 2010).



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## PRAYING FOR THE POOR

### PRAY FOR COMPASSION FOR THE POOR

*Proverbs 21:13: "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered."*

Scripture states that Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw the throngs. Pray today that we, as God's people, are moved with a Christlike compassion when looking upon and ministering to the poor.

*Matthew 20:34: "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him."*

### PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN NEED

*Psalms 12:5: "Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the Lord. "I will protect them from those who malign them."*

One does not have to look far before discovering people who are in need spiritually, physically, financially, and emotionally. Pray today that God miraculously meets the needs of those who are suffering.

*1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*

### PRAY FOR THE DREAMS OF THE POOR

*Psalms 14:6: "Do you think you can mess with the dreams of the poor? You can't, for God makes their dreams come true" (THE MESSAGE).*

Those who find themselves in need dream of the day when things will change and be better. God uses people to help fulfill those dreams. Pray today that God shows you what you and your family can do to help make the dreams of the poor and suffering come true.

*Isaiah 41:17: "The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them."*

— Excerpted from Thomas Trask, *21-Day Prayer Guide for the Poor & Suffering* (Springfield, Missouri: Convoy of Hope, 2011).

One of the goals of each prayer summit is to foster unity among believers. One purpose and one heart characterize the entire day. People of different denominations and backgrounds come for the common purpose of praying for the poor and suffering.

The prayer summits have proven to be among the most powerful prayer times in my ministry. When we enlist God's help and power, things happen. Many who participate have said that the summit has helped them rediscover God's heart for people who are lonely, hungry, and forgotten.

### How can pastors find more information about the prayer summits?

**TRASK:** They can go to [www.prayforhope.com](http://www.prayforhope.com) or call Convoy of Hope at (417) 823-8998.

### Please explain the 12.12 prayer initiative.

**TRASK:** The 12.12 prayer initiative is the vision of Assemblies of God World Missions missionary Tom Lofton, one of our Global Prayer Initiative team members. This initiative is a network of compassion organizations and church fellowships from around the world that want to make a difference by praying for those who are hurting. Already major ministries such as National Day of Prayer, National Hispanic Alliance, International House of Prayer, Guideposts, and The General Council of the Assemblies of God have joined this effort. The goal is to encourage believers, every year, to pray for the poor and suffering on December 12. We ask believers to petition God for salvation, justice, safety, water, food, shelter, healthcare, education, and employment for the world's needy. The response, so far, has been overwhelming.

In 2012, we are combining our Global Prayer Summit with the Global Day of Prayer. We will hold this summit in Jerusalem on December 12.

### What evidence do you see that God is growing the compassion and prayer movements together?

**TRASK:** This is not the work of man; it is the work of the Spirit of God. The Lord is awakening the church to her social responsibility and the church is responding. The compassion/prayer movement is not just one particular denomination, fellowship, or prayer group. It is the Holy

in which we are holding the prayer summit as well as needs for our nation. Each summit also intersperses times of worship between the various presenters and prayer times. We sometimes ask God to come against the spread of AIDS, malnutrition, homelessness, and more. We follow this time of prayer and worship with Communion.

Spirit bringing the body of Christ together.

**On a personal level, what has the Lord been saying to you about believers maintaining an active prayer life?**

**TRASK:** When I first started in the ministry, an elderly minister advised me to set aside time each day to be with God. I have tried to give Him the first hour and a half of every day to pray and meditate on His Word. There is no substitute for prayer. The enemy does not care if we talk about prayer or write about it; he just does not want us to pray because God responds to prayer.

**What resources are available for pastors who want their churches to join in praying for the poor and suffering?**

**TRASK:** We have several resources on [www.prayforhope.com](http://www.prayforhope.com). Some of these are free downloads. Pastors have taken the *21-Day Prayer Guide* and walked their congregations

through these specific prayer needs. Others have used the 12 prayer points of the 12.12 Global Day of Prayer initiative. Some pastors have used these resources and ended their prayer emphasis with a One Day To Feed the World offering. This offering challenges people to give one day's wage to feed the poor.

**Anything else you would like to share?**

**TRASK:** You have not asked for this, but I need to say it. Having been on the inside of Convoy of Hope for a number of months, I can say with complete confidence that this ministry and its leadership are seeking God and operating with great integrity. They are not satisfied with the status quo. They want to see millions reached through the citywide outreaches, feeding programs, and disaster initiatives. It has been my joy to see the Assemblies of God, Convoy of Hope, and other fellowships and ministries walk arm in arm to fulfill the Great Commission. 🌍

“  
*The enemy does not care if we talk about prayer or write about it; he just does not want us to pray because God responds to prayer.*  
”

H I G H L I G H T S:

## Chaos

Managing the Mayhem of Ministry**Caring for Yourself  
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If the job of pastor's wife seems too big or too overwhelming, the problem may be with the expectation, not the job itself.

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If we listen carefully this Christmas, past the commercialization and programs, we can still hear the echo of this song.

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To give people voice and dignity, we need to slow down the communication process, close our mouths, and open our ears.

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Scott Hagan

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# Song of the Angels

**W**e live in interesting and challenging days, much like the days leading up to the advent of Jesus. Christmas elicits emotions, hopes, and concerns. So, too, the Incarnation happened during a time of concern, fear, and hope. Into such a turbulent setting, the angels announced, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14, NKJV).

This angelic song encapsulates the message of Christmas. It embodied Jewish redemptive hopes of the first century, and significantly gave voice to the hope for the redemption shared by Jews and Christians throughout the centuries.

If we listen carefully this Christmas, past the commercialization and programs, we can still hear the echo of this song.

## The Text of Luke 2:14

Older translations of the angelic song (or if you grew up on *A Charlie Brown Christmas*) expressed a threefold message: 1. "Glory to God in the highest"; 2. "On earth peace"; 3. "Goodwill toward men."

Most modern translations preserve a twofold hymn, reflecting recent scholarly opinion: 1. "Glory to God in the highest"; 2. "Peace on earth among men with whom He is pleased" (NASB).

The difference between these two readings derives from a variant spelling of a Greek word within the manuscripts of Luke's Gospel. The threefold angelic proclamation comes from manuscripts containing the Greek word εὐδοκία, "goodwill," in the nominative case: "on earth peace, goodwill toward men." The twofold proclamation comes from the reading εὐδοκίας. The addition

of the *sigma* (ς; pronounced like the English letter "s") at the end of the word makes it the genitive case: "and on earth, peace among men of *his will*" (emphasis added).

The difference of one letter significantly changes the meaning of the angelic proclamation from God's goodwill being directed toward all mankind, to His peace resting solely on those of His will, i.e., the elect. Both readings reflect two competitive worldviews within Jewish society in the first century.

## The Worldview of the Twofold Hymn: "sons of His will"

Recent scholarly opinion gravitates toward the twofold blessing of the angels based on the assumption that the Greek manuscripts of



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Luke that preserve the phrase ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας (i.e., the twofold hymn) are better manuscripts. In support of this judgment, scholars appeal to the appearance of the Hebrew phrase אֲנָשֵׁי בְנֵי רְצוֹנוֹ ("men/sons of His will") in the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>3</sup>

Among the library of the Qumran Scrolls was a collection of hymns called "Thanksgiving Hymns." These hymns express the sectarian worldview of the Qumran/Essene community. In one hymn, the author declares, "Your [God's] compassion is for all the sons of your will (בְּנֵי רְצוֹנְכָהּ), for you have made them know the counsel of your truth, and in the mysteries of your wonder you have given them insight" (1QHa 19:9).

## The difference of one letter significantly changes the meaning of the angelic proclamation from God's goodwill being directed toward all mankind, to His peace resting solely on those of His will.

Qumran sectarians believed in a strict dualism in which God divided the world among the elect — "the sons of Light," and the damned — "the sons of Darkness." God predetermined which lot one belonged to solely by His will. He demonstrated His glory by His salvation of the "sons of Light," or His judgment of the "sons of Darkness." Within the sectarian scrolls, the Hebrew word רְצוֹן ("will") became a technical term for the sectarian belief of God's predestination of the righteous and wicked.<sup>4</sup> The dualism accepted by the Qumran community was connected to their belief that God predetermined the "sons of Light" and "sons of Darkness" by His will, and not based on the righteous or wicked actions of the people. Thus, the "sons of Darkness" acted wickedly in all their ways because they manifested their predetermined status. The "sons of Light" bore witness to their predetermined status because they walked in the way of His will. This dual predestination led the Qumran community to conclude that God only showed compassion to "the sons of Your will," i.e., the elect. Moreover, they drew the moral conclusion that they should hate whatever God hated, i.e., the "sons of Darkness": "to walk perfectly before him (according to) all revealed (laws) at their appointed times, and in order to love all the sons of Light each according

to his lot in the Council of God, and to hate all the sons of Darkness each according to his guilt at the vengeance of God" (1QS 1:8-11). This is the worldview behind the twofold angelic blessing: "peace among men of His goodwill."

### The Origin of the Threefold Hymn: Isaiah 6:3

The threefold angelic proclamation declares a more universal message of God's goodwill toward all mankind (cf. Luke 2:10). Jewish literature of the Greco-Roman period contains angelic songs. All angelic songs found in the literature of this period derive from two angelic utterances in the Old Testament: Isaiah 6:3,

earth, the work of his might], goodwill toward men [Holy — for endless ages is the Lord of hosts]."<sup>5</sup>

The influence of Isaiah 6:3 on the threefold hymn of the angels in Luke 2:14 also connects the Lukan hymn with the ancient benediction, the *Kedushah* ("Sanctification"):

**Reader:** "May we sanctify (שְׁכַדֵּשׁ) Your name in the world as it is sanctified in the highest of heaven (Matthew 6:9,10), as it is written by the hand of Your prophet: And they called one unto the other and said,"

**Congregation:** "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

**Reader:** "Those over against them say, 'Blessed' " —

**Congregation:** "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place" (Ezekiel 3:12, KJV).

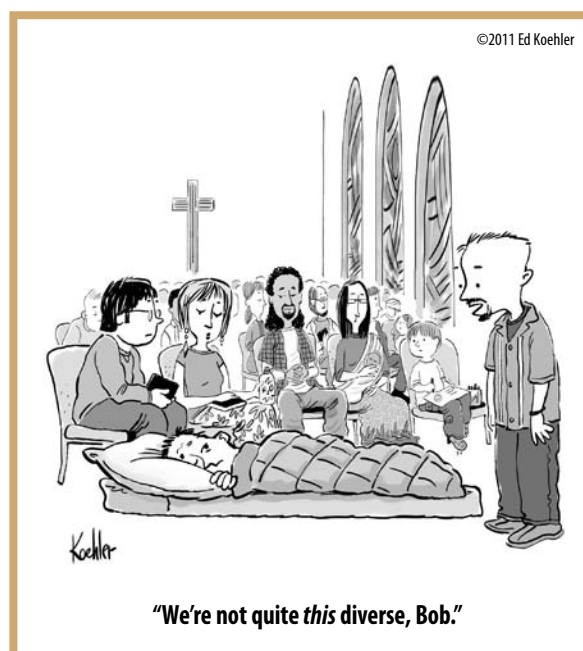
**Reader:** "And in your Holy Words it is written, saying,"

**Congregation:** "The Lord reigns (יִמְלֹךְ) for ever, your God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise you the Lord' (Psalm 146:10). Unto all generations we will proclaim Your greatness, and to all eternity we will tell of Your holiness. Your praise, O our God, will not cease from our mouth forever, for You are a great and holy God and King. Blessed are You O Lord, the holy God."

With the advent of Jesus, God draws near to His people — His goodwill is for everyone. His

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (KJV) and Ezekiel 3:12, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place" (KJV). The threefold "holy" of the angels in Isaiah 6:3 provided a literary structure for angelic prayers within later Jewish literature.

The Aramaic *targum* (translation) of Isaiah 6:3 interpreted the song of the angels: "Holy — in the highest heaven, the house of his presence, Holy — upon the earth, the work of his might, Holy — for endless ages is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of the brightness of his glory." This expansion of the angelic message in Isaiah 6:3 is strikingly similar to the threefold blessing of the angels found in Luke 2:14: "Glory to God in the highest [Holy — in the highest heaven, the house of his presence], on earth peace [Holy — upon the



reign dawns through those who obey His will.

### The Worldview of the Threefold Hymn

The angels told the shepherds that their message of good news “will come to all people” (Luke 2:10). God’s goodwill is not simply for the elect; it extends to everyone, for “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). His merciful will reaches out to all mankind to bring peace, completeness, and wholeness. And, in the birth of Jesus, God has drawn near to demonstrate within the bounds of history what His will is, to give voice and example to His will (cf. Hebrews 1:1,2).

Jesus repudiated the worldview of the Qumran sectarians, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’ but I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” It seems unlikely that the message of the angels at His birth would

have embraced such a sectarian exclusivity. Jesus rather articulated the growing movement of Jewish humanism that viewed all people as having worth and value because every person has been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). He challenged His followers to “be merciful just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

The angels’ message announced God’s nearness. God is for us, and He has drawn near to us. God is a part of human history; therefore, there is hope. God has not turned a blind eye to the suffering of the righteous or a deaf ear to the cry of the afflicted. His mercy extends to all mankind, and He will redeem us. So, as you celebrate Christmas this year — a year that has been filled with fear, uncertainty, and turmoil in the world — meditate and declare with the angels: “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” ☺

#### NOTES

1. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New

King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

2. Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (www.Lockman.org).
3. Cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, “Peace upon Earth among Men of His Good Will” (Luke 2:14), *Theological Studies* 19 (1958): 225–27; idem, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 1:410–12; and Randy Buth, “The Sons of His Will,” *Jerusalem Perspective* (November/December 1989), 6,7.
4. Within the Old Testament, the word רצון has a more universal meaning of God’s goodwill.
5. David Flusser, “Sanktus und Gloria,” in *Abraham unser Vater: Festschrift für Otto Michel zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. O. Betz, M. Hengel, and P. Schmidt; Leiden: Brill, 1963), 129–52.



**MARC TURNAGE**, director,  
Center for Holy Lands Studies for  
The General Council of the  
Assemblies of God, Springfield,  
Missouri





### Caring for Yourself in

### CHAOS

**Y**ou just learned today three members of your ministry team are intentionally not talking to each other, the computer mainframe experienced a “hiccup” this morning resulting in the loss of thousands of names and addresses, the resort where the annual women’s conference will meet in 3 months lost the reservation and refuses to take your calls, and the junior high pastor just submitted her resignation because of sexual discrimination among staff members.

Chaos is not just change. Chaos is change on steroids — change taking place so quickly and so often there is no time to emotionally, spiritually, or physically accommodate to the latest demand.

The first-century Roman poet, Ovid, described chaos as “a rough, unordered mass of things” (*Metamorphoses* 1,7). Is this ancient writer describing the top of your desk right now?

For those whom the Lord has called to speak for Him on this wobbling, warped, and wanton world, chaos should not surprise us. There are two reasons why chaos will always be the milieu of our ministry.

First, chaos was the backdrop for the creation narrative. Notice that our theology rests on the primordial account. The biblical writer contrasted “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” against “the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). Chaos, from the beginning of time, was the *a priori* argument that “no one was home in the universe” until Yahweh showed up.

Second, chaos was the OB ward for the Son of God. Bethlehem was so small, insignificant, and overrun by the chaotic rabble of the day the only option for a crib was a saliva-spattered feed trough.

Chaos is an essential part of our story and chaos is an essential part of our theology. Like our Lord, God has called us to reach into the dark abyss of chaos and offer light and life (1 Peter 2:9).

So, we should be cozy with chaos. Chaos should not be a surprise for those who have willed their lives to do ministry. Our responsibility is to make sure chaos does not victimize the messenger.

#### Chaos and Clergy Burnout

You and I have probably heard this adage, “I would rather burn out for Jesus than rust out in some dead church.” Frankly, I am convinced both options are camouflage for complacency.

“Burn out for Jesus” does not sound heroic or even biblical. One of the worst indictments against

the Church, with its message of good news (*euangelion*), is to peek into the minister’s home and find a dispirited, disenfranchised, and despondent messenger of the gospel. Unfortunately, the Church has historically refused to admit that spiritual leaders can be candidates for the emotional malady called burnout.

A particularly helpful book for clergy is *Burnout: Stages of Disillusionment in the Helping Professions* by Jerry Edelwich and Archie Brodsky. In this resource, the authors framed five sequential stages in the process of emotionally spiraling down from grandiosity into disillusionment.

#### Stage one: exaggerated enthusiasm

This is the rose-colored glasses moment in the timeline of ministry when the professional clergyman assumes he will become a denominational household name who does not have the time or energy to satisfy all the invitations to grace pulpits around the globe.

In this stage, the minister experiences spasms



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of euphoria that often spill into giddy mental images of wall-to-wall adherents who are sermon-spellbound in a 100,000-seat stadium.

This initial stage of burnout totally avoids the potential for chaos. Very quickly the rose-colored glasses get fogged over with the mist of mayhem — the realities of living in a very imperfect world.

### Stage two: stagnation

Here the present trumps the future and slowly the walls start to move in on the visionary spiritual leader. Cooperation from the once supportive board of elders is waning. The stellar reputation of a particular Christian college academic department turned out to be a Trojan horse packed with loud, marauding educators. And, a new mission field becomes a burned-over field of broken commitments.

In stage two, hope that sprung eternal has sprung a leak. Stagnation means the minister whom chaos victimizes is doing a lot of staring.

### Stage three: frustration

Slipping into this scene is an emotion most professional clergy have difficulty admitting: anger. Frustration morphs into anger because the servant of God believes others have betrayed him. And, nothing hurts more than betrayal.

The reality of this stage comes from a promise someone made and then broke. But, the breaking was open, hostile, and intended to injure.

The problem with this type of anger is it often seeps through the fabric of how we express ministry. The pastor often laces this “trait anger” through public settings — teaching, preaching, and leading worship. Without the spiritual leader knowing it, the faithful perceive him as someone who is pervasively angry about everything.

### Stage four: apathy

This is the worst stage because the spiritual leader appears to have no internal energy to be positive or whole again. “Don’t make waves” and “Let sleeping dogs lie” become the mantra of this witness for Christ.

The physiological marks of stage four are: no initiative, emotional and physical withdrawal from family and friends, sleeping too much or too little, eating too much or too little, demonstrating unusual irritability, loss of physical energy, and a preoccupation with the past. In this stage, chaos has claimed another victim.

### Stage five: intervention

The minister smashes mediocrity on the rocks of reality in this stage. The burned-out clergy grabs his bootstraps, rises up, and makes a defining choice between victimization and proactivity.

Some professional clergy whine down their calling into a pathetic paste of paralysis. They believe people and circumstances have dealt them a bad hand. They will spend the rest of their lives reminding anyone who will listen to them. A flawed denominational system or some faceless power broker snuffed out the flame of their potential greatness.

## For those whom the Lord has called to speak for Him on this wobbling, warped, and wanton world, chaos should not surprise us.

On the other hand, there are the survivors. They will briefly admit they have been smashed, mashed, and dashed on the shoreline of chaos, but are eagerly searching for another, strong place to stand.

Do these five stages of burnout look familiar?

### Ministering to the Minister ... in the Mirror

The paradigm of pain you have just read is preventable. And, caring for yourself is your responsibility.

Assuming the ultimate power is with you, here are five pragmatic actions you can immediately initiate so chaos remains present but not pernicious. First, who is your minister?

Specifically, what is the name of someone who has a history of carefully listening to what you think and feel and then gives you unvarnished, truthful feedback?

Chaos, without feedback from someone outside your head, gets distorted. If no one looks at you and says, “Wait a minute, that sounds disingenuous, distorted, depressing, what is going on inside you right now?” you may be building a very small life where the only people you let in are those who will tell you what you want to hear.

Second, spend time with a humble “great” person. This person is so secure in his or her faith and skin that conversations about failure are not threatening.

Be prepared; these people may not have titles. These are normally uncomplicated people who

probably have shot themselves in the ecclesiastical foot more than once but have demonstrated their panache to bind up their wounds and just move on without whining.

When I meet these people, they are unmistakable. The first characteristic you will detect is they have mastered the art of thanksgiving. Every day is Turkey Day. Their life is the simple tale of someone who rode chaos right into the ground, got up, dusted themselves off, and then gave thanks they have learned not to do that again.

Third, in your devotional life admit the presence of chaos in ministry and then ask

our Lord to center you in His profound silence. The lie of the ministry is this: if offerings are up, people are filling the pews and regularly slapping you on the back with appreciation, you must be tight with God.

Surrounding yourself with holy noise can create deafness of spirit. I am specifically suggesting you find a retreat environment where silence confronts you. It is in the “nothingness of the Spirit” (Thomas Moore, *The Care of the Soul*) where we begin to restructure our souls and futures.

Fourth, engage in annual strategic planning with your ministry partners. In this process introduce “chaos quotients.” These are the worst-case scenarios that will test your ability to keep moving, building, and growing.

Finally, look in the mirror and again make your family your first congregation. When spouses, children, and others in your immediate family only see you behind a pulpit, an image on a Jumbotron, or a quickly passing body in an institutional hallway, chaos wins. God called you first to your family before He ever called you to a ministry. ☺



**CAL LeMON, D.Min.**, president, Executive Enrichment, Inc., Springfield, Missouri, a corporate education and consulting firm

## What Every Person Wants

**W**hat does every person want? Better living conditions? Civil rights? Somebody to love? A clean environment? A new car? Lower taxes and less government? A vacation? More? An endless supply of chocolate?

Most people want all of those, but what does *every* person in the world want? Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, thinks he has the answer.

According to Welch, every person in the world wants voice and dignity. Not only do they want it, but they deserve it.

In his book *Winning*, Welch defines voice as “the ability to speak their minds and have their voice heard, regardless of their nationality, gender, age, or culture.”

By dignity, he means, “people inherently and instinctively want to be respected for their work and effort and individuality.”

When I first read Welch’s statement, my gut reaction was, “Well, duh. It doesn’t take a corporate giant to understand that people want others to hear them and recognize their work.”

Then I thought about my team of 25 or so employees and the nearly 1,000 volunteers who make this ministry work. I began to wonder how much voice and dignity I give them as their leader.

- How many times have I legislated change from the top down?
- How many times have I ignored the bottom of the ladder because I knew what was best for the organization?
- How many times have I discounted someone’s opinion because she was too young?
- How many times have I overlooked the efforts of other people because their job involved processes or tasks I do not find appealing?

That led me to ask myself, *How can I do better at giving people a voice and dignity? Are there changes I need to make so people have voice and dignity?*

**To give people voice and dignity, I need to slow down the communication process, close my mouth, and open my ears.**

opening his mind to the opinions of others, earned him the respect and confidence of others. The old saying reminds us that we have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we talk.

As a leader, my tendency can be to try to get people to understand what I am saying, where I am going, and how I want it done. In the rush to get this information across, I can be guilty of talking first and listening later — if at all. To give people voice and dignity, I need to slow down the communication process, close my mouth, and open my ears. In the end, slower can be faster. If I hear them earlier, I can save a great deal of headache later.

### **Make Performance Reviews and Goal Setting a Two-way Street**

Too often reviews are one-way conversations where the supervisor points out what is going well and what the employee needs to improve in his area of responsibility. Creating a dialogue by working with the employee to set goals for himself during the next review period creates a two-way conversation more about where the employee is headed and not just where he has been.

### **Listen More Than You Talk**

Joseph Ellis, a best-selling historian who focuses his interest on the American Revolution, asserts in his book, *American Creation*, that George Washington became a leader because he listened well. His calm demeanor and his ability to hold his tongue, while



### **Focus Your Agenda**

Leaders have three primary tasks: evaluate, coach, and build self-confidence in their employees and volunteers. Through team meetings, one-on-one interactions, and team-development settings, I try to focus my agenda on evaluating, coaching, and building the confidence of my employees and volunteers.

Evaluating means making sure you have the right people on the team — and the right people in the right spots on the team. It means supporting, rewarding, and advancing people who are making a contribution to the team, and confronting and training those who are not. Evaluation is too important to be done once or twice a year in a formal setting. It must happen through every interaction with employees.

Coaching is about guiding, critiquing, and helping people perform their role to the best of their ability. It’s about helping people know how to look at their performance and critique it themselves — to ask the right questions and determine possible courses of action. One way to coach is to never let your team ask you essay questions. Essay questions are open-ended questions where you supply the essay answer. Make them ask you multiple-choice questions where



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they must offer you choices. Then, help coach them to the right answer.

Building self-confidence is about pouring out encouragement, care, and recognition. It is about energizing people and giving them the courage to stretch forward, take risks, and fulfill their dreams. Self-confidence is the fuel of winning teams. Self-confidence comes from making good decisions, choosing right options, and developing winning ideas.

### Create Feedback Loops

Feedback loops enable you to uncover doubt within your organization. Every organization — especially those engaged in significant change — has some level of doubt. Good leaders want to know the level of doubt in the organization so they can address it and keep the team moving forward toward the change goal. But often leaders do not want to hear about people's doubts.

Take the political town hall meeting as an example. When a president or presidential candidate engages in a town hall meeting, the handlers make sure all of the attendees

are on his side. They do not want any oddball or aggressive questions. They want softballs lobbed so their candidate can knock them out of the park. Leaders who engage in that type of feedback loop are trapped in a cul-de-sac of their own thinking.

Pastors can develop real feedback loops as they conduct congregational surveys, Internet surveys of first-time guests, 360-degree evaluations where employees evaluate the organization and their supervisor, as well as creating an atmosphere where we enable people to speak freely in appropriate settings.

Another way to create feedback loops is to formally and informally meet with key leaders and ask for their opinion. Ask them to help you improve the process. Let them know you cannot implement every idea, but let them know you value what they have to say. You may know more about where you want to go, but they know more about where you are right now as an organization.

### Ask Questions Outside of Your Strength

As a leader, I am obsessed by mission, aims, and strategy — process does not interest me as much.

That is not my strength. But, I have several employees who deal with process. If I do not ask questions about areas of ministry that do not interest me as much as strategy or creativity, then the message I send is that your ministry role is not valuable to me. But, if I ask questions about how the process works, about how the employee or volunteer accomplishes his task, I give that task dignity, and I give the employee or volunteer voice.

### Celebrate Wins

One of the best ways you can start a meeting is by celebrating the wins. Let team members share a victory in their area of ministry since the last time you met. This builds confidence in them and in the vision. It also gives them voice and your response gives them dignity.

As a pastoral leader, I try to celebrate wins every Sunday by bringing up what has worked right in the previous week — whether it was an outreach project that had great results or a person who made a difference in someone's life.

### Make Sure You Have Their Backs

Employees and volunteers need to be sure you have their best interest at heart — even when they are not in the room. They need to know you want what is best for them and not just what is best for the organization. That only happens as you build trust with employees or volunteers over time.

### Apologize When You Mess Up

You are not going to make the right call every time. You are not going to respond correctly to every issue. You will make mistakes. When you admit you are wrong and apologize to employees whom you have wounded or wronged, you give them dignity.

I am not perfect when it comes to giving people voice and dignity, but I want to do better. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is a starting point for me. It can be a good launching pad for you, too, as you seek to give those who follow you a voice and dignity. 🌀



**GLENN REYNOLDS** is lead pastor of Bethel Temple (Assemblies of God), Hampton, Virginia. He is a doctor of ministry candidate at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, where his degree concentration is redemptive leadership and organizational development.

## Compassion Without Compromise:

How a Leader  
Can Find That  
“Sweet Spot”  
When Everything  
Is on the Line

**S**in is sin. But sometimes sin feels scarlet. Sometimes it leaves behind a broad facial scar ... creating an ugly change of identity. For the son of Corinth, his sin stood out like a ruby stain against white satin. Even if you believe sin comes in different shades, no one would argue that his was bright red. Yet, his name remains nameless; his identity is still shrouded in secrecy.

Initially, Paul may have had a passing thought about publicly marking this son of Corinth — like Achan of old, or Alexander, Paul's contemporary. But Paul chose a different path.

Maybe to Paul, this sin seemed different. Even among secular Corinth — notorious for temples dedicated to sexuality and widespread commercial immorality — this sin was unthinkable. The woman at the well with a history of five husbands and one live-in, or the half-dressed woman seized in adultery, were child's play compared to the reports coming out of Corinth. “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife” (1 Corinthians 5:1).

Scripture does not indicate whether the husband was living or dead when his wife and son began their sexual relationship. From an Old Testament position, the Law of Moses was clear about such liaisons: “Cursed is the one who sleeps with his father's wife” (Deuteronomy 27:20).

There was no provision in the Old Testament law for a son to take in a deceased man's wife. The Law forbade it under all circumstances. Some theologians have suggested that she may have been his stepmother

and not his biological mother. While that may lessen the unpleasantness, God still forbade it.

Something snapped in the minds and hearts of these two individuals. It was high-stakes perversion. I can picture Satan receiving this report and dispatching an executive team of demons to confirm the accuracy of the report. If true, he would hammer the faithful of Corinth for years and create permanent division among leadership. Corinth, the city, could shrug its shoulders and move on. But how could Corinth, the church, ever recover? One simple phrase says it all. “I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him” (2 Corinthians 2:8).



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I find it both remarkable and freeing as a pastor that the Lord placed this story in the Bible. It is ugly, yet it makes the Lord beautiful.

Providing leadership during a moral catastrophe is difficult. People tend to question everything. A pastor feels pressured to do something quickly to show leadership and strength. This story, however, unfolds with a balance of decisiveness and sincere compassion. Paul found that Kingdom-sweet spot with his handling of this messy graphic display of human depravity.

Paul could have left this paragraph out of his letter. He did not mention every problem or issue the Corinthian church faced, so why this one? Easy. It has been a picture of all that God can do when fearless leaders who champion grace instead of religion give Him clearance to act. Just as the Jews demanded the release of Barabbas, some in the church were calling for the wrong outcome. Many saw punitive judgment as the proper course of action against such a sinner. But Paul led from an entirely different worldview. Nothing is beyond the bounds of grace, not even someone whose sin made pagans blush.

Growing up as a kid in the seventies, one thing was clear: our family television was not that impressive. We had a used, portable black-and-white Zenith. Our family moved 27 times by the time I was 16, so portability was a necessity.

Let me say that when it came to riches and fame, our family stood out like a tree in the middle of dense forest. We had one bathroom and one couch with a big tear on the middle cushion. Even my blue jeans had the perpetual patches over both knees. But the real clincher was the family car — a 1966 Rambler. The problem? It was 1975. Please do not get me wrong; love abounded, just not in the form of fancy materialism. Our cereal boxes were full. So was my Christmas stocking. And I always had a new Eveready battery for my transistor radio.

The idea of elaborate might have meant a new soap-on-a-rope, or maybe a full box of store-bought Popsicles in the freezer. As for that old Zenith TV, we placed it precariously on a creaky stand in the corner of our living room. Cable was for the rich; so to improve reception, we wrapped the two bent antennas in aluminum foil from a freshly recycled Ho-Ho wrapper.

I remember watching the grainy images of men landing on the moon on that Zenith. I can

also remember Walter Cronkite's nightly death tolls from Vietnam.

To turn on the set, you pulled out the small on button. But when you first pulled the button, nothing happened. We did not worry; we all understood that the set had to warm up. You knew things were okay if you saw the dot. After a few more seconds, the dot became a thin line stretching from one side of the screen to the other. Then all of the sudden the line would explode into a bright square. Then after another 30 seconds a clear picture formed.



So why are we talking so much about an old Zenith? Because sometimes a God story takes time to warm up as well. The dot, the line, the square ... it is like grace. You need to be patient and give it a minute to warm up and work. Especially if the person we are loving and leading is in moral chaos.

Grace requires reality as its starting point. Denial never activates grace. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians dealt with the reality of the man's sin. After delivering him over to Satan (1 Corinthians 5:5) Paul writes, "But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Paul was telling the congregation that, by his own actions, the man had forfeited all rights to a normal life. Paul instructed the church family to give the man what he wanted until the man could stand it no more. The length of the detention would be up to him.

It is amazing what a year alone with the devil can do for the soul. The power of grace, when given the chance over time to work, brings miraculous results. We find the real grace of Paul's leadership in the chronology of his second letter to the Corinthians. Paul penned and delivered 1 Corinthians possibly in spring A.D. 55. He penned and delivered 2 Corinthians possibly in fall A.D. 56. A little over 12 months had passed.

To some, his words about the incestuous son are more shocking than the original sin. "The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2 Corinthians 2:6,7).

Paul was calling them to regard the feelings of the one who had disregarded theirs just over a year earlier. The man who had lived on the outside of the church for the past year wanted and needed back in. But the lock on the door

**Be patient and allow grace time to warm up and work. Especially if the person we are loving and leading is in moral chaos.**

was inside, not on the outside. It would take an action on the inside to get the outsider back into fellowship. He had fulfilled his part of the deal; the church must fulfill theirs.

It is not easy to welcome home front-page sinners. It is much easier to bolt the door and tell everyone on the inside to stay quiet until the knocking ends and the outsider leaves thinking no one is home.

Paul demanded that grace become a policy of the church. He chose his test case well. The key was patience, then some proper prodding. Just like the old Zenith, grace takes time to warm up. The key is not to turn it off thinking it is broken before the picture comes into focus. Grace is timely, but it can also be time consuming. Restoration has moving parts. Pastoral leadership takes true courage, because all you can do is hold steady while things play themselves out.

The beauty of grace is this: not only is it at work inside the heart of the sinner, it is also working on the hearts of the audience who watched him sin.

May we all discover that same sweet spot. ☺



**SCOTT HAGAN** is senior pastor, Mars Hill Community Church of the Assemblies of God, Sacramento, California.





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## Is Naturalism a Simpler Explanation Than Theism?

**P**hilosopher David Papineau declares “nearly everyone nowadays wants to be a ‘naturalist.’”<sup>1</sup> Western intellectuals call naturalism the “orthodox” view. The late Carl Sagan of *Cosmos* fame succinctly described this “orthodox” doctrine of naturalism: “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”<sup>2</sup>

The space-time universe — which we can study with physical sciences — is all there is. Rather than appealing to “occult,” “spooky,” “supernatural,” or “theistic” explanations, naturalists claim their worldview is simpler. It requires fewer entities to explain the way things are. Right? God is a metaphysical fifth wheel — a mere explanatory appendage. God simply is not *necessary* to account for the way things are. “Science” will do just fine.

### Three Features of Naturalism

That is the big picture. Let me break it down by reviewing its three key characteristics.

**#1: Knowledge (epistemology) is the increasing tendency to see knowledge as nothing more than what contributes to survival rather than requiring a belief to be true.** We intuitively recognize that knowledge by definition requires *truth*. Also, knowledge requires we do not hold a true belief accidentally, but that we have some warrant or proper basis: *knowledge* = (i) *a belief that is (ii) true and also (iii) warranted*. Let’s unpack this.

*Truth*: Truth is a match-up or correspondence with reality. I cannot *know* the earth is flat; I cannot know the sun orbits the earth. Why? These beliefs are false; *they do not match up with reality*. I cannot know the earth is flat or the moon is made of cheese. Why? Because they are not. Despite this

commonsense insight, naturalists are increasingly tempted to deny that *truth* is necessary for knowledge.

Not all naturalists take this view (called “naturalized epistemology”); but given naturalism’s starting point, many do. We cannot talk about how we *ought* to think (the role of traditional “philosophy”); we do not have some philosophical obligation to *reject as many false beliefs as possible and to embrace as many true ones*, we are told. Rather, our focus should be on how human beings *actually happen to think* (“psychology”); we can study beliefs that are aimed at survival rather than at truth.

*Warrant*: If naturalists are right, it seems we are just biological organisms whose beliefs are pumped into our brain by physical forces beyond



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our control; so, if one's survival-producing beliefs are true (they match up with reality), it's purely *accidental* — not *rational*. We might *believe* humans have intrinsic dignity and rights, and this may help us as a species to survive, but this belief would be completely *false*.

Naturalistic evolution is interested in survival, not truth. So the naturalist has no more control over his own beliefs than the Christian. That is, the naturalist cannot claim to be more rational than anyone else. Atheistic beliefs are just as random as theistic ones since physical forces beyond rational control produce these beliefs. Humans are just surviving beings who form beliefs to survive — even if they happen to be false.

**#2: Causal explanations (etiology) are the tendency to explain all events mechanistically (from the Big Bang to the choices we make each day), which implies a kind of determinism.** Naturalism's grand story of origins is that our universe had physical, impersonal, mechanistic beginnings, and this physical cause-and-effect scenario describes all events since the

### The Background Test

Naturalism is an all-or-nothing proposition. It requires throwing out many of our commonsense beliefs — the soul's existence and that of free will, moral obligations, and evil. But is naturalism the better explanation?

Let's put naturalism and theism to the "background test" by asking: *Which worldview best explains various features of the universe and human experience phenomena? Is naturalism or theism the least surprising context given these features?* We can go down a fairly hefty checklist and say, "God . . . God . . . God." The origin and fine-tuning of the universe, the emergence of first-life and of consciousness, the existence of human rights/dignity, objective moral values, free will, rationality, beauty, and even the existence of evil, the existence of a powerful, intelligent, good Creator makes the best sense.

Ask: which scenario is more plausible — that *consciousness* came from *nonconscious* matter or from a supremely *self-aware Being*? Or that *personhood* emerged through *impersonal*

*versions of Hinduism*. A personal Creator immediately simplifies things.

### Is Naturalism Really Simpler?

Naturalists, however, will claim that naturalism is simpler because *fewer* entities exist — that is, the *physical cosmos* is all there is. The theist believes in *the universe plus God* (not to mention "plus souls plus angelic creatures"). God seems unnecessary: if naturalism explains things, why bring God into the picture? Let's offer a few responses.

*First, whenever possible, we should use the principle of simplicity or economy to get rid of unnecessary explanations.* Consider polytheism (many gods) versus monotheism (one God). We can ask: Why involve extra entities when just one will suffice? All things being equal, if *one* God (monotheism) is adequate for the task of creating and sustaining the universe, why bring in multiple deities? There is no reason to multiply additional entities beyond necessity — a principle known as "Ockham's razor." Extra gods can be plausibly eliminated on the basis of explanatory simplicity. One God will do just fine.

*Second, while atheism is theoretically simpler than monotheism, this is true only in a numerical sense — and this "greater simplicity" turns out to be problematic.* As noted from the chart on page 110, eliminating God as an explanation leaves us with massive conundrums as well as huge gaps in our understanding. This move just does not enhance our power to explain. In fact, removing God from our explanatory resources *reduces* our explanatory power dramatically. Naturalism is simply inadequate to account for a number of different features of the universe and our human existence. Christian Philosopher Alvin Plantinga correctly observes that theism — or more specifically, the Christian worldview — "offers suggestions for answers to a wide range of otherwise intractable questions."<sup>3</sup> That is, without God, we would just be left with just-so stories — "that's just the way it is" explanations — regarding how the universe began, how it came to be finely tuned, how humans came to have dignity and worth, how beauty emerged, how consciousness came about, and so on.

*Third, if we apply the principle "the fewer entities the better" across the board, then why not just say, "No explanatory entities are better than one"?* In 1668, Francesco Redi, an Italian

## Eliminating God as an explanation leaves us with massive conundrums as well as huge gaps in our understanding.

Big Bang — including my choices and beliefs.

So the historical string of physical causes from the Big Bang until now implies *determinism*. No room remains for *free will*, which enables an agent to *rise above purely physical influences*. We could argue, though, that our legal and prison systems assume that humans are not simply "dancing to their DNA," as Richard Dawkins says. We have moral control over our actions, despite genes and environment. *Personal* causes are part of reality, not simply physical ones.

**#3: Entities that exist (ontology) are based on the assumption that only physical things exist.** That is, if something is not strictly physical (e.g., a mind), it necessarily depends on the physical for its existence; so, in the case of the mind, it would completely cease at death. God or angels (spirit beings) do not fit anywhere in the naturalist's radar screen of reality. Yes, naturalism is tied to physicalism; reality is comprised of matter.

That is a brief sketch of naturalism. What are we to make of it and its alleged simplicity?

processes or by way of a *personal* Creator? Or that *free will* emerged from *deterministic* processes or from a Being who *freely chose* to create? Or that a finite time ago the universe *just popped into existence*, uncaused out of nothing or that a powerful Being *brought it into existence*? Naturalism does not really help us here. At least we can say that "something's out there," a reality beyond nature — something we ought to explore seriously.

In the chart on page 110, note how theism is the *less surprising, more natural* context than naturalism to explain these important features of the universe and human existence.

By comparing contexts, we see that theism repeatedly makes the best sense, offering a better, more natural fit than naturalism. Furthermore, when people ask, "Why theism? What about all the other religions?" we can suggest this: *If a personal God exists, then this would rule out not only naturalism, but Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and certain*

PHENOMENA WE OBSERVE, ASSUME, OR RECOGNIZE	THEISTIC CONTEXT	NATURALISTIC CONTEXT
(Self-)consciousness exists.	God is <b>supremely self-aware/-conscious</b> .	The universe was produced by <b>mindless, nonconscious</b> processes.
<b>Personal</b> beings exist.	God is a <b>personal</b> Being.	The universe was produced by <b>impersonal</b> processes.
We believe we make <b>free personal decisions/choices</b> , assuming humans are accountable for their actions.	God is <b>spirit</b> and a <b>free Being</b> , who can freely choose to act (e.g., to create or not).	We have emerged by <b>material, deterministic processes</b> beyond our control.
<b>Secondary qualities (colors, smells, sounds, tastes, textures)</b> exist throughout the world.	God is <b>joyful</b> , and secondary qualities make the world <b>pleasurable</b> and <b>joyful</b> to His creatures.	The universe was produced from <b>colorless, odorless, soundless, tasteless, textureless particles and processes</b> .
We <b>trust our senses and rational faculties</b> as generally reliable in producing true beliefs.	A God of <b>truth and rationality</b> exists.	Because of our impulse to survive and reproduce, <b>our beliefs would only help us survive, but a number of these could be completely false</b> .
Human beings have <b>intrinsic value/dignity and rights</b> .	God is the <b>supremely valuable</b> Being.	Human beings were produced by <b>valueless</b> processes.
Objective <b>moral</b> values exist.	God's character is the source of <b>goodness/moral values</b> .	The universe was produced by <b>nonmoral</b> processes.
The <b>universe began to exist</b> a finite time ago — without previously existing matter, energy, space, or time.	A <b>powerful, previously existing</b> God brought the universe into being without any pre-existing material. (Here, <i>something</i> emerges from <i>something</i> .)	The universe came into existence <b>from nothing by nothing</b> — or was, perhaps, self-caused. (Here, <i>something</i> comes from <i>nothing</i> .)
First <b>life</b> emerged.	God is a <b>living, active Being</b> .	Life somehow emerged from <b>nonliving matter</b> .
The universe is <b>finely tuned for human life</b> (known as “the Goldilocks effect” — the universe is “just right” for life).	God is a <b>wise, intelligent Designer</b> .	All the cosmic constants <b>just happened to be right</b> ; given enough time and/or many possible worlds, a finely tuned world eventually emerged.
<b>Beauty exists</b> — not only in landscapes and sunsets but in “elegant” or “beautiful” scientific theories.	God is <b>beautiful</b> (Psalm 27:4) and <b>capable of creating beautiful things</b> according to His pleasure.	Beauty in the natural world is <b>superabundant</b> and in many cases <b>superfluous (often not linked to survival)</b> .
We (tend to) believe life has <b>purpose</b> and <b>meaning</b> . For most of us, life is worth living.	God has created/designed us for certain <b>purposes</b> (to love Him, others, etc.); when we live them out, our lives find <b>meaning/enrichment</b> .	There is <b>no cosmic purpose</b> , blueprint, or goal for human existence.
<b>Real evils</b> — both moral and natural — exist/take place in the world.	Evil's definition assumes a <b>design plan</b> (how things <i>ought</i> to be, but are not) or <b>standard of goodness</b> (a corruption or absence of goodness), by which we judge something to be evil. <b>God is a good Designer</b> ; His existence supplies the crucial moral context to make sense of evil.	Atrocities, pain, and suffering <b>just happen</b> . This is just <b>how things are</b> — with no “plan” or standard of goodness to which things <i>ought</i> to conform.

scientist, tried to show that maggots did not simply appear spontaneously from rotting meat — despite the popularity of this belief. Redi tried to show that maggots came from flies' eggs. To test his hypothesis, he put meat specimen A into a sealed jar; he laid out meat specimen B in the open air, giving it fly-accessibility. As he suspected, the protected

meat did not produce maggots; the exposed meat did.

This raises an interesting question: Why not believe in “spontaneous generation” since it involves fewer entities? But that is like assuming that the rabbit *really* popped into existence from nothing, suddenly appearing in the magician's hat. Why think that life just popped into

existence from nonliving matter? Or, even better, why a *universe* from nothing and not something else — like a herd of elephants? Surely, something's coming from *nothing* is “simpler” (i.e., requiring fewer entities) than something coming from *something*.

Surprisingly, some atheists *are* willing to accept that something can come from nothing



or that the universe is even self-caused. Of course, we should not be surprised at this, given the obvious theistic implications of Big Bang cosmology. Yet, the atheist philosopher Kai Nielsen gets the following scenario right: "Suppose you hear a loud bang . . . and you ask me, 'What made that bang?' and I reply, 'Nothing, it just happened.' You would not accept that. In fact you would find my reply quite unintelligible."<sup>4</sup> Agreed. In fact, science itself — the naturalist's alleged home turf — reinforces the idea that something cannot come out of nothing. Yes, it is *numerically* simpler to say that *nothing* caused something than that *one* thing caused something. *Zero* entities are simpler than *one* entity. But to explain events *without any sufficient reason* — that they "just happened" — is clearly inadequate. Based on Nielsen's example, I suspect that if the Big Bang did not strongly suggest a Creator, naturalistic scientists and philosophers would not be motivated to suggest something could come into existence out of literally nothing. The chances of something coming from nothing are exactly *zero*.

The metaphysical bankruptcy of the "something from nothing" idea does not just apply to the beginning of the universe. It applies to the emergence of first life, consciousness, moral value, beauty, reason, and a host of other

features. It makes better sense to say that *life came from life*, that *consciousness came from consciousness*, and that *moral values came from a supremely valuable Being*.

Atheist Philosopher Michael Martin claims there is no reason why objective moral values cannot be comprised of matter.<sup>5</sup> There is a big problem here. We will search in vain for a physics textbook listing "moral value" as one of matter's properties. But perhaps we should not be surprised that Martin believes moral values *could* emerge from valueless matter. After all, Martin elsewhere claims to believe the universe could emerge from literally nothing!<sup>6</sup> The fact is: Martin accepts that *value* somehow emerged from *valueless* processes. This "simplicity" is not very smooth or natural. What *is* smooth, however, is that "value comes from value — not valuelessness." If a supremely valuable Being exists, we can readily explain the existence of morally valuable human beings. We must earnestly ask and pursue the answer to the next question: "If there is something 'out there,' has this being revealed itself? Can we find out more about this being — perhaps through special revelation?" These are the questions any genuine seeker of truth needs to ask.

### Concluding Thoughts

Naturalism is "simpler" in that it involves fewer

entities within its system. But that does not help in accounting for the universe, its major features, and key aspects of human experience. To get rid of God means losing significant explanatory power. A theistic context helps us make sense of many important characteristics of the created order. Resorting to beliefs such as *the universe came from nothing* or *the universe caused itself* flies in the face of the very "scientific method" naturalists so heartily applaud.

Theism guides us to a clearer explanation of things, shedding light in otherwise dark places. As C.S. Lewis put it: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."<sup>7</sup>



**PAUL COPAN, Ph.D.**, West Palm Beach, Florida, is professor and Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, Florida. He is author and editor of a number of books, including *When God Goes to Starbucks*, *True for You, But Not for Me*, *That's Just Your Interpretation*, and *Creation Out of Nothing*. He is also president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society.

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Reverend Rodney runs his sermon from the Song of Solomon by his wife for her approval.

## The Promises and Perils of Personalized Medicine



**F**rom experience, we know that one size does not fit all in medicine. A cancer treatment that leads to remission in one patient may have no effect in another patient. A drug may produce dangerous side effects in only a small percentage of the population. The effective dose for a medication may vary even among patients in the same age group with similar characteristics.

Throughout the history of medicine, predicting how a particular patient will respond to a treatment has been a frustrating challenge for doctors. Yet, the emerging science of pharmacogenetics — the study of how and why specific medications work only in certain populations — promises to clarify the mystery, allowing doctors to tailor treatments to individual patients.

Pastors who walk alongside parishioners experiencing serious illnesses support them emotionally and spiritually. When a treatment fails to work for a patient, doctors and patients lose valuable time. This often dashes any hope for recovery. A patient may suffer emotionally and spiritually as well as physically. Personalized medicine can reduce the frequency of these medical failures. Most pastors would consider such a medical advance to be a great blessing.

Yet, for personalized medicine to work, doctors need to test the patient's genetic makeup. Since a person shares genetic information with biological family members, when a patient undergoes a genetic test, the results may have implications for the rest of the family. The genetic test yields personal information that can produce the potential for good or for harm. As personalized medicine becomes more commonplace, pastors may find themselves ministering to individuals and families trying to make sense of the promises and perils of this new tool.

### Tailoring Treatments to the Patient

In the last decade, personalized medicine has seen its greatest successes in treating cancer. Drugs can target a genetic mutation that is limited to cancer cells, not the patient's normal

cells. Therefore, these drugs will have fewer side effects than traditional chemotherapy. Drugs such as Herceptin for breast cancer, Gleevec for chronic myeloid leukemia, and Iressa for non-small-cell lung cancer are examples of cancer drugs that work well for patients with certain genetic mutations in their tumor cells.

Pharmacogenetics extends beyond cancer treatments. Researchers have found that genetic testing using microarray technology (a two-dimensional array of DNA on a small glass chip) can predict adverse reactions with antidepressants. How quickly certain liver enzymes, called cytochrome P450 enzymes, process a drug determine the drug's effectiveness and safety. If liver enzymes metabolize a drug too quickly, the drug will be ineffective. However, if the liver enzymes work so slowly that the drug accumulates, an

otherwise safe medication might poison a person. In rare cases, a patient may be unable to process certain drugs at all, resulting in both ineffective treatment and unwanted side effects. Genetic information can provide doctors with dosage guidelines.

As another example, researchers recently found that about 30 percent of people carry a genetic variation that prevents them from properly metabolizing the antiplatelet drug clopidogrel, or Plavix, commonly prescribed to prevent heart attacks. These patients need either a higher dose of the drug or a different anticoagulant medication.

In the future, pharmacogenetics will enable researchers to design safer and better medications. In a decade, doctors may be able to analyze a patient's genetic blueprint during a routine office visit, with genetic testing becoming as common a diagnostic tool as a urinalysis or a blood count.

### Considering Implications for the Family

Since we share genetic information with biological family members, a genetic test has implications for the patient's family that other diagnostic tools, such as a blood count, do not. For example, if a granddaughter chose to undergo genetic testing after seeing her grandfather suffer from Huntington's disease, her test results would also reveal her mother's carrier status. Tension can arise



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in families when family members disagree over whether they want to discover genetic bad news ahead of time. As genetic testing becomes more prevalent, pastors may need to counsel families in conflict over differing views on this technology.

When genetic testing involves children, parents must make decisions that will impact their children's future. Furthermore, genetic testing may reveal which side of the family is the source of the disease-causing mutation. A good genetic counselor will remind parents that each person carries an estimated 6 to 25 genes that could trigger a disease in his or her offspring under certain circumstances. A pastor can help parents receiving difficult medical news avoid the unproductive responses of blame and guilt.

Patients are accustomed to keeping certain medical details private. However, when knowledge of the results from genetic testing can affect the medical care of other family members, does a physician have a duty to warn those family members? Most of the time a doctor simply encourages patients to share test results with their family members. However, if the patient dies before having opportunity to share those results or refuses to disclose the information, the doctor may be sued for failing to warn the family.

Finally, for many diseases, a genetic mutation simply indicates an increased health risk, but not a certain diagnosis. A person's environment and lifestyle influence whether or not a genetic risk ever translates into a disease. Our genes do not

necessarily determine our destiny, but they do speak to future probabilities. In many cases, taking responsibility for our health and making wise choices can prevent a genetic weakness from manifesting. From a spiritual perspective, pastors can discourage fatalistic thinking, reminding parishioners that "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

## The study of genetic information should remind us that we all carry hidden weaknesses and untapped strengths.

### Preventing Discrimination in Society

The implications of genetic testing extend beyond the family unit to society as a whole. To prevent discrimination based on genetic information, we need to ensure patient privacy. The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) of 2008 prohibits genetic discrimination by health insurers and employers and grants the same privacy protections to genetic information that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) provides for medical records. GINA prevents health plan administrators from charging an individual a higher premium based on a genetic predisposition to develop a disease. However, once a genetic disease manifests, the protections of GINA no longer apply. GINA also does not affect life, disability, or long-term care insurance.

Beyond legal protections against discrimination in employment opportunities and insurance coverage, we need to consider any social stigmas that might arise from genetic testing. As the price to sequence a person's genome (complete genetic blueprint) falls below \$1,000, we could enter an era where doctors analyze a child's genetic information at birth and make it available to plan future health care. Theoretically, individuals could use such information to determine the genetic compatibility

of a potential marriage partner. How would a child's knowledge of genetic weaknesses, even ones that may never manifest, affect the child's view of himself? Would parents treat a child differently based on the knowledge of a child's genetic strengths or potential to develop a life-shortening disease in adulthood?

Pastors might consider how knowledge of our

genetic information could impact our spiritual life. From a broader viewpoint, discoveries about genetic variation remind us of our uniqueness. As King David declared nearly 3,000 years before the discovery of the DNA double helix, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14).

The challenge for individuals learning of their genetic strengths and weaknesses will be to affirm David's response to God's creation. Genetic predispositions, whether positive or negative, simply remind us of our uniqueness. Our genes show us the possibilities for our life, but they need not limit our potential. The Bible is filled with accounts of individuals who have achieved great feats in spite of physical limitations and social constraints.

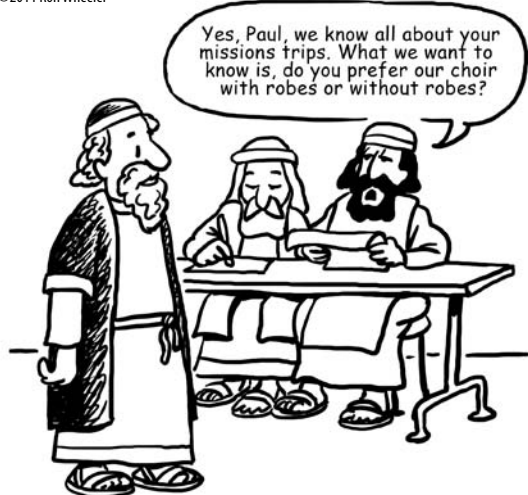
Personalized medicine has the potential to ease human suffering and save lives. We should embrace the promises of this tool, while carefully considering how to protect patient privacy and prevent discrimination based on the most personal of all information. Ideally, study of genetic information should remind us that we all carry hidden weaknesses and untapped strengths. We each have been given different gifts to use for the benefit of others and for the glory of our Creator. ☪



**CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL, Ph.D.**, an ordained Assemblies of God minister, and medical research scientist, preaches in churches and conferences nationwide. She is a research fellow at Harvard Medical

School and Massachusetts General Hospital as well as the founder of Life Impact Ministries.

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**Great moments in church history:**  
**The first pastoral search committee is formed.**





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## I Never Wanted to Be a Pastor's Wife

**Q.** My husband and I have been married for 15 years. He became a pastor after we had been married 10 years. We pastor a medium-size church in a metropolitan area. I have tried to back his vision, but I am already weary of church life and all that goes with it. I never wanted to be a pastor's wife. I was always adamant that I would never marry a pastor and I didn't. However, my husband felt called to pursue ministry after we had married. I went along with him to support him, but find that I long for a normal family life without interruption, expectation, and congregational pressure. I don't know what to do.

**A.** I cannot count the number of times in our 30 years of ministry that various women have said to me, "I could not do what you do. I could *never* be a pastor's wife."

Ladies often make this comment after they find out I am a pastor's wife. They give me a startled look and a quick up-and-down glance followed by the above self-disclosure. Evidently, they assume this role is something distasteful and difficult, requiring some great and lofty giftings that they lack.

I never quite know how to respond. The fact is, I am a pastor's wife whether I chose to be or not. And, I can honestly say I do not have any special strength or courage. How does one respond? I have thought of various comeback phrases over the years, but I have yet to use one. Instead, I choose to grin and mumble something incoherent and hopefully, gracious.

The truth is, most of us came to this role without specifically asking for it. I suppose there are women who intentionally sought out and married a minister because of a strong desire to be a pastor's wife. But in my experience, this is far from the norm. Most of us simply fell in love with someone and pledged our lives and future to someone who already had or will receive a call to serve God and others in ministry. We became part of the package.

I have good news for you. The role and responsibilities that go along with being a minister's wife are as diverse and individual as you are. Defining yourself as a pastor's wife should be similar to the process of breaking in a fine pair of shoes. You start with an adequate fit at the store, but it isn't until you wear them for a while that they mold to your feet, eventually feeling like a second skin. You start by being yourself and then, by experience, grow into a place that fits you like that second skin. Free yourself of unrealistic expectations to be something you are not, nor have the desire to ever be. That might mean challenging or discarding the pastor's wife box in your mind.

Unfortunately, in some circles we have come to believe that the pastor's wife should carry out her role in a certain way. A pastor's wife should look, act, serve, or (fill in the blanks). While some rise to the occasion and fill the shoes splendidly, others feel overwhelmed before they even start trying. If the job seems too big or too overwhelming, I would suggest the problem is with

the expectation, not the job itself. I am not suggesting you should not strive to become better. However, your expectations for growth need to match your own situation and calling.

His calling will, to some degree, influence where you live, with whom you interact, and with what you will be involved. (This would be the case no matter what your husband did for a living.)

## The roles and responsibilities that go along with being a minister's wife are as diverse and individual as you are.

The fact is, you do have a calling. It is not a calling to a cookie-cutter box, but it is a calling to serve God with your whole heart, using the particular set of tools He has given you. It is a calling to grow and become more of what God created you to be. Every believer is called to this task.

You are a woman of God, called to a purpose that is as unique and as individual as you are. You are also married to a minister who has a passion and vision to pursue the call on his life.

However, your own calling will also influence these things.

Blending your lives together becomes a journey of discovery. It helps a great deal if your husband is on the same page when it comes to his expectations of you. If he is not, this is something you need to address as a couple. It becomes a marriage issue of not being on the same page. You and your husband need to deal with this.

There are definite challenges that come along

with pastoring. You mentioned a few of them: time, expectations, and stress. Again, these challenges will certainly affect your home and marriage. You need to approach these together. Speak with your husband about your feelings and concerns. Become one another's allies and problem solve together. A team effort will keep you from feeling alone in your struggle. Again, seek outside help if this is a problem.

Be yourself. Be in the process of learning what that means. Above all, ask for God's help and know that His favor is yours. His expectation is that you would first and foremost seek Him and grow into His love. Once you feel free to stop striving, the rest comes more easily. ☺



**GABRIELE RIENAS**, a pastor's wife for 30 years and a professional counselor, lives in Beaverton, Oregon. She speaks at retreats, conferences, and events worldwide. Contact her at 503-705-9230.

**Edgar Ackerman, III**  
San Antonio, Texas

**H. DeLois Aldridge**  
Anadarko, Oklahoma

**Nell M. Ariail**  
Brea, California

**Ruby M. Asher**  
Union City, Tennessee

**Linwood M. Ball**  
Warrenton, Virginia

**Mildred Bankson**  
Rockford, Illinois

**Anna M. Beard**  
Boaz, Alabama

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Redding, California

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Rio Rancho, New Mexico

**Linwood T. Wilkinson**  
Lynchburg, Virginia

**Dwight J. Wilson**  
Scotts Valley, California









## ■ Compelling Forces

**ROBERTA LASHLEY BONNICI**, Chesapeake, Virginia

**TEXT:** Luke 14:23

### INTRODUCTION

The parable of Luke 14:15–24 points out the human tendency to be occupied with material things, totally disregarding the claims and call of Christ. Perhaps the greatest enemy of the gospel is not open opposition, but gross indifference.

To press through spiritual barriers and win the lost, a Christian must have supernatural compelling forces operating through his or her life. Paul was an anointed witness. His life reflected a divine glow that captured and held the hearts and minds of his listeners.

### MESSAGE

#### 1. A compelling message.

God inspired Paul's thoughts, and the force of Paul's message rested on this fact. He was faithful in declaring God's words, not his own.

##### a. Punishment for sin (Galatians 6:7).

The message of sin and judgment is never popular, but it is compelling since it causes man to face his spiritual predicament. Until man realizes he is a sinner, scheduled to appear before a holy God, he has little interest in the plan of redemption. But when the hopelessness of his situation is made real to him, he is compelled to seek an answer to his soul's need.

##### b. Pardon for the penitent (2 Corinthians 7:10).

A sorrow over our sins and a desire to be cleansed and forgiven are healthy signs. God's offer of pardon and relief from the burden and guilt of sin is the compelling attraction of the gospel. This is what the sinner is unconsciously seeking in his pursuit of soul-numbing pleasure and material security. He can find inner satisfaction only through reconciliation to God (2 Corinthians 5:17–21).

#### 2. A compelling manner.

Paul felt the urgency of his message and spoke with conviction. His fervent spirit caused some to say he was "beside himself." He was a messenger aflame with the truth he proclaimed to others.

##### a. Positive (Philippians 4:13).

Paul's confidence was anchored in the authority and ability of Jesus Christ. His personal faith in God added to the force of his message. He lived in the Spirit and therefore could communicate the things of God effectively. His own spiritual victory compelled others to have confidence in his ministry. The radiance of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life is a positive, attracting force. Our joy and positive outlook should compel others to desire the Christian way.

##### b. Persuasive (2 Corinthians 5:11).

Paul was so sure of his message he did not hesitate to bring pressure on his listeners to place their trust in Christ. There were no doubts or uncertainties in his mind concerning the reality of Jesus Christ, and he spoke with the intent of turning hearts to Him. After hearing Paul's testimony, even King Agrippa admitted, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28).

#### 3. A compelling ministry.

Paul's ministry was effective because it was characterized by the same compelling motivation as was portrayed in the ministry of Christ.

##### a. Passionate (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Paul's ministry was based on an all-consuming love for God and for lost humanity. This was not a passing emotion, but his chief reason for being. It was Paul's wholehearted devotion and dedication to the will of God that enabled him to endure suffering and hardship for the cause of Christ. His ministry was based on love and love is, indeed, a compelling force.

##### b. Powerful (1 Corinthians 2:4,5).

Paul's ministry also bore the supernatural thrust of the power of God. His conversion brought him in contact with God's miraculous working, and this experience took him on to further demonstrations of divine might. The supernatural signs bore witness to the truth of the Resurrection that Paul preached. The power of God is a compelling force, pointing men to the living Christ.

### CONCLUSION

God's table is spread. The needy and hungry are all around us. We are His witnesses, commissioned to bring the lost to Him. We can compel them to come when we permit the Holy Spirit to work through us (Acts 1:8).

## ■ David's Psalm of Thanksgiving

**STANLEY MICHAEL**

**TEXT:** 1 Chronicles 16:7–36

### MESSAGE

#### 1. Give thanks (verses 9–11).

- a. By singing (verse 9).
- b. By giving Him glory (verse 10).
- c. By seeking His face (verse 11).

#### 2. Remember (verses 12–14).

- a. His works (verse 12).
- b. His wonders (verse 12).
- c. His judgments (verses 12, 14).

#### 3. Be mindful (verse 15).

- a. Of His covenant (verses 15–22).
- b. Of His Word (verse 15).
- c. Of His greatness (verse 25).

## ■ Thanks Be To God

**STANLEY HORTON**, Springfield, Missouri

### INTRODUCTION

Five times Paul used this phrase not found anywhere else in the New Testament. It is literally "to God, grace" in the sense of gratitude. We open our hearts to Him in thanksgiving the same way He opens His heart to us in His grace.

### MESSAGE

#### 1. For the effectiveness of the gospel (Romans 6:17).

#### 2. For victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:57).

3. For leading us in triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14).
4. For faithful servants to help us (2 Corinthians 8:16).
5. For Christ himself (2 Corinthians 9:15).

## ■ Incarnation Truths

**TERRY L. TERRELL**, Sparta, Wisconsin

**TEXT:** Matthew 1:18–25; 2:1–11

### INTRODUCTION

It is vital to accept the scriptural statement that Jesus was born of a virgin. Neither human sperm nor ovum was involved. The Holy Spirit wrought the divine conception.

### MESSAGE

#### 1. Conceived (Matthew 1:20).

- a. Conceived by God.
  - (1) The plan of salvation.
  - (2) Love for us created us in His image.
  - (3) Love brought coats of skin to cover sin in Eden.
  - (4) Love ends with the blood of God's only Son to cover our sins.
- b. Conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit.
  - (1) Humanity was not involved — only the divine.
  - (2) There is no other Savior — no other name under heaven given among men whereby we might be saved.
  - (3) Gandhi, Confucius, Mohammed, old or modern preachers cannot save us. Only Jesus can.
- c. Conceived for us. We are the only reason for His divine conception (John 3:16; Philippians 2:5–11) — so much does God love us.

#### 2. Born of a virgin (Matthew 1:18,23).

- a. Born of a virgin not for Mary's sake — it only caused her problems (reputation, family, friends, Joseph). By the Law, her pregnancy could have resulted in her death.
- b. Not for Joseph's sake. It nearly cost him his fiancée, affected his future, his reputation, his residence, his employment.
- c. Not for Jesus' sake was He virgin born. He lowered himself to be born of a virgin. He endured attacks of Satan, experienced hatred among His own city and people, was cruelly tortured and crucified, and bore our sins to the grave.
- d. He was born of a virgin for our sake — to atone for our sins, to cover our sins, that we might experience life more abundantly, to reunite us with God for eternity.

#### 3. He is to be worshiped (Matthew 2:10,11).

- a. The Wise Men did not worship the star — that would have been idolatry. We are not to worship stars, angels, bells, lights, trees, crucifixes, etc., for these are also idols.
- b. The Wise Men did not worship Joseph, even though he housed and protected Jesus.
  - (1) Nor should we worship denominations, creeds, doctrinal statements, codes, churches, even though they may house the truth of the Savior.
  - (2) Worship Him alone.
- c. The Wise Men did not worship Mary, though she was the miracle vessel of His birth.
  - (1) We do not worship miracles.

- (2) Nor do we worship at the feet of those who are vessels for miracles.
- (3) Even angels in God's Word refused worship.
- d. The Wise Men worshiped Jesus Christ alone.
  - (1) Physically — falling down before Him.
  - (2) With their lips — praising Him.
  - (3) With their gifts — blessing Him.
  - (4) With their lives — committed to Him.

### CONCLUSION

These truths are of inestimable value. Let us take a cue from the Wise Men and worship Christ with our bodies, lips, gifts, and our lives. He is the greatest gift anyone can receive.

## ■ Elijah

**JERRY NEWSWANDER**, Huxley, Iowa

**TEXT:** James 5:17

### INTRODUCTION

Elijah was a man with great faith. He was also a man with weaknesses like all men. He dealt with his weaknesses in God's power, became victorious, and was an effective instrument of righteousness in God's hands.

### MESSAGE

#### 1. A man of prayer (James 5:17).

- a. Prayer is communication with God.
- b. Prayer is a time when God talks to us.
- c. Prayer is sweet fellowship with God.
- d. Prayer strengthens the child of God.

#### 2. A man of purpose (1 Kings 18:17–40; Philippians 3:7–10).

- a. Earthly man asks, "What can I do to preserve the human race?"
- b. Spiritual man asks, "What can I do to advance the kingdom of God?"
- c. Our purpose is to live for and serve the Lord.

#### 3. A man of like passions (1 Kings 19:3,4; James 5:17).

- a. Elijah faced the same emotional, mental, and psychological problems man faces today.
- b. He dealt with those problems with God's help.
- c. Jesus will give us rest as we go to Him (Matthew 11:28).

#### 4. A man of possibilities (Mark 9:23; Luke 1:37).

- a. He believed and obeyed the Lord.
- b. Believing and obeying will result in possibilities that become realities.
- c. Understanding our purpose for being helps us realize "all things are possible to those who believe."

#### 5. A man of the "parousia" (2 Kings 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

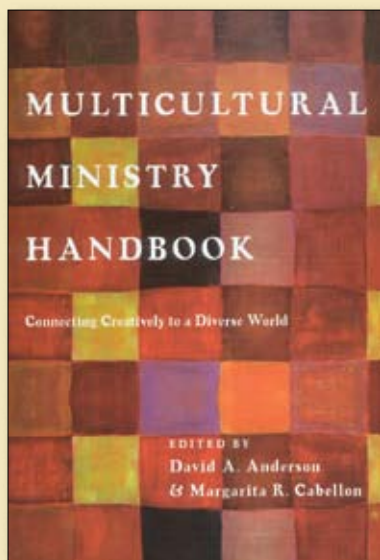
- a. Elijah was "caught away."
- b. A type of rapture of the saints.
- c. When Jesus returns He will rapture all Christians.

### CONCLUSION

As Christians follow these characteristics of Elijah, they will become victorious and more effective instruments for the advance of God's kingdom.

For additional sermons, visit [www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org](http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org).  
Look under Resources for Practical Ministry.





### Multicultural Ministry Handbook: Connecting Creatively to a Diverse World

DAVID A. ANDERSON, MARGARITA R. CABELLON, EDS., (InterVarsity Press, 181 pp., paperback)

**D**o you have a vision for the demographics of your congregation to reflect the changing demographics of your community? If so, *Multicultural Ministry Handbook* may be a helpful resource. David Anderson is the planter and pastor of Bridgeway Community Church, a 2,500-member multicultural church near Washington, D.C. Anderson previously served on staff at Willow Creek. One example of Anderson's influence is that Bill Hybels, formerly a homogenous church-growth advocate, now advocates growing intentionally diverse churches. This change was a direct result of Hybels visiting Bridgeway. Margarita Cabellon is executive director of BridgeLeader Network.

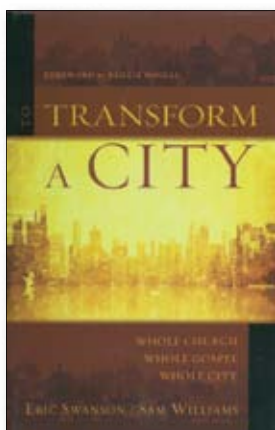
Reading this handbook is like attending a seminar at Bridgeway, with presentations from Anderson and nine other church leaders. All are committed to the church's mission — "To become a multicultural army of fully devoted followers of Christ, moving forward in unity and love, to reach our community, our culture, and our world for Jesus Christ."

Starting on page 11, Anderson shares his four building blocks for a multicultural ministry. He then provides questions for pastors and staff to answer as they consider multicultural ministry.

The best introduction to this handbook is to do what Hybels did — visit Bridge-way. If you cannot visit in person, visit its website. I would suggest the following process: As senior pastor, visit [www.bridgewayonline.org](http://www.bridgewayonline.org) and read the information posted there. If you believe Bridgeway's vision and model may be helpful, read *Multicultural Ministry Handbook*. If you then desire to either launch a new multicultural church or increase diversity in your existing church, lead your church leadership team (pastoral staff, leadership team, and ministry heads) in working through the book together.

*Multicultural Ministry Handbook* will help you and your church begin to build a multicultural ministry.

— Reviewed by Scott Temple, director, Intercultural Ministries, Springfield, Missouri.



To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City

### To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City

ERIC SWANSON, STAN WILLIAMS (Zondervan, 224 pp., hardcover)

A pastor friend remarked that God did not call him to pastor the church he was currently pastoring. God had called him to pastor his community through the church. One of the impressions that resounded with me through this book was the mentality shift needed — like my friend Brett — to lead city transformation.

The authors believe culture change happens not necessarily through confrontation but by providing an alternative story. By providing something better than what currently exists, a cultural change can happen. While this book may challenge one's position towards ecumenicalism (collaboration and partnering with other churches and organizations), it does provide practical advice, stories, and next-step applications for a leader to walk through.

One story in the book illustrates why the ideas presented are important for every pastor/leader to embrace. Organizers planned a World AIDS Day march held at Cal State Fullerton. Churches and secular organizations participated in that march. The march itself was not a Christian event, but according to the authors, if the church does not show up, the march will go on without them. "Think about all of the conversations that never would have happened had the church been absent." The authors continue, "How can the church be the leavening agent when we are absent from the community?"

Perhaps, Swanson and Williams could have said more about the transforming power of the work of the Holy Spirit. However, when city leaders and pastors collaborate together, that is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work within a city. I highly recommend this book to those who desire to have significant influence within their city.

— Review by Jason Bachman, outreach director, Convoy of Hope, Springfield, Missouri.

## Generous Justice

TIMOTHY KELLER (*Dutton Adult, 256 pp., hardcover*)

*Generous Justice* has a unique ability to make you take a second look at how you not only think about social injustice, but also how you respond to that injustice. This book does not expose the needs of the poor, but makes readers consider how they will respond to what they see.

Timothy Keller begins by explaining the real meaning of justice and eventually *generous justice*. Justice is “care for the vulnerable,” not the punishment of wrong — to do justice and love mercy, or to do justice out of merciful love. Justice is also about “right relationships.” Biblical righteousness is social because it is about relationships.

Justice also includes generosity. Giving with the right purpose or motivation brings us to the place where we realize God has given us everything we need. Thus, we respond with generosity to those who have not. “To whom much is given, from him much will be required” (NKJV) is not just a personal spiritual mandate; it is the response of a grateful heart that realizes I can never give back or give forward enough to equal what God has given me.

Doing justice is not just performing an act and then keeping score of all we have done to temporally alleviate the suffering or plight of the poor. Keller states, “God does not want us to merely give the poor perfunctory help, but to ponder long and hard about how to improve their entire situation.” Psalm 41:1 says we need to consider the poor. *Consider* can be translated “to give sustained attention to a subject.”

Keller insists that God continuously aligns himself with the poor, the widow, and the immigrant — the most powerless and vulnerable members of society. Using Matthew 25:35–40, the author states, “The God of the Bible says, as it were, ‘I am the poor on your step. Your attitude toward them reveals what your true attitude is toward Me’ ” (author’s paraphrase).

This book caused me to more clearly focus on who is my neighbor and what my responsibility is toward him as I lead a church with a generous heart and a compassion for the most vulnerable.

— Reviewed by David A. Jayne,  
pastoral care/community pastor, Central Assembly of God,  
Springfield, Missouri.

## Churches, Cultures, & Leadership

MARK LAU BRANSON AND JUAN F. MARTINEZ  
(*InterVarsity Press, 275 pp., paperback*)

Although “ethnic homogeneity in American churches has been the norm from colonial days” and the homogeneous unit principle has been a leading principle in church growth theory since the 1980s, the authors of *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership* ask, “What is the call of the gospel on churches?”

Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez of Fuller Theological Seminary use their course outline on churches and ethnicities in describing how pastors and church leaders can help their congregations fulfill that call by crossing cultural boundaries with the intent of becoming *intercultural*. (*Cultural boundary crossing* is a key phrase for the authors. They prefer the term *intercultural* to *multiethnic* or other similar terms.)

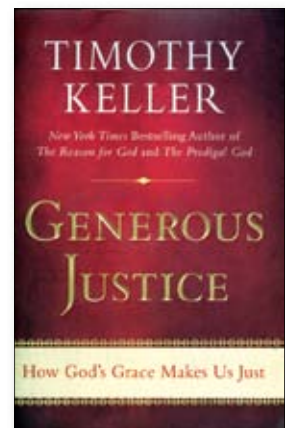
*Churches, Cultures, and Leadership* has three parts: Theology and Context; Sociocultural Perspectives; Leadership, Communication and Change. The authors draw from an array of disciplines: theology, sociology, anthropology, and even some linguistics, giving it an academic tone.

At the heart of the book is the authors’ practical theology cycle, along with Bible studies and suggested movies, to help a congregation better understand their own cultural perspective, as well as assess their understanding of the church’s mission, the role of church leadership, history, race relations, and intercultural life. This book is filled with insights regarding culture, language, and intercultural relationships.

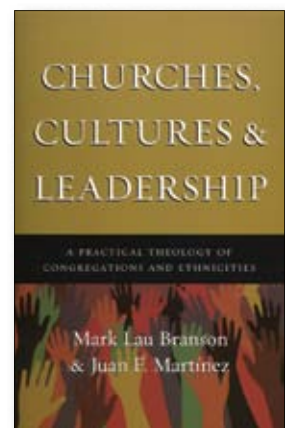
For 12 years I have pastored a multicultural church near New York City. We celebrate the diversity within the congregation. This book, however, forced me to ask: Although we have many cultures represented within our congregation, have we (I) begun to understand, appreciate, and incorporate into the life of the church each other’s cultures? Have we moved from being multicultural to intercultural?

Although some may find *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership* a slow and difficult read, those who are willing to digest its concepts will receive a cultural tool kit to aid them as they lead their church toward cultural boundary crossing.

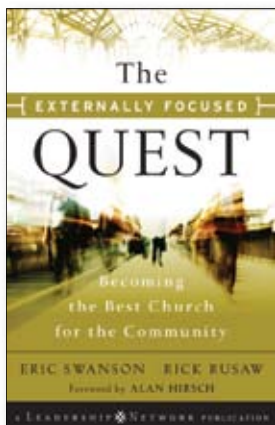
— Reviewed by Timothy A. Harris,  
lead pastor, Promise International Fellowship,  
Queens, New York.



Generous Justice



Churches, Cultures, & Leadership



**The Externally Focused Quest:  
Becoming the Best Church  
for the Community**

## **The Externally Focused Quest: Becoming the Best Church for the Community**

ERIC SWANSON, RICK RUSAW (*Jossey-Bass, 272 pp., hardcover*)

*The Externally Focused Quest* is not for everyone. If you are comfortable with doing church rather than being the church, if you are happy doing things the way you have always done them, or if you are not open to new and innovative ideas on what a 21st-century church is to look like, this book is not for you. If you are, however, looking for a guidebook on how to transition from being the “best church in your community to becoming the best church for your community,” then *The Quest* is for you.

I thought I pastored an externally focused church. I realize now that I was merely looking over into the Promised Land. Swanson and Rusaw’s book shows the milk and honey of a true externally focused church.

I have long felt that if I got one good idea out of a book, it was worth the price. *The Quest* offers a myriad of sound, practical, and Bible-based

ideas. Ideas on how to become more externally focused without having to give up programs that serve members are worth the price of the book.

As I made my way through this book, I found myself going from wanting to change the church to wanting to change my community to wanting to change the world — and believing I could do it.

— Reviewed by Michael Jackson,  
senior pastor, New Life Assembly, Janesville, Wisconsin.

## **Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families & Churches**

RUSSELL MOORE (*Crossway Books, 232 pp., paperback*)

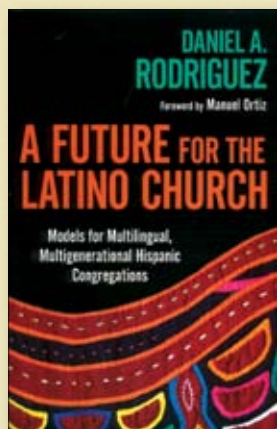
“Are they brothers? They are now.” I love that question and the resulting answer in *Adopted for Life*. Read it and weep in more ways than one.

Moore and his wife, Maria, adopted two boys from Russia. After returning to the United States, they dealt with a whole range of questions — some out of natural curiosity, others out of ignorance — that people ask parents of adopted children.

This book describes in great detail two

## **A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations**

DANIEL A. RODRIGUEZ (*InterVarsity Press, 200 pp., paperback*)



“Do leaders and members of Hispanic churches in the United States recognize that their communities are also in a moment of transition?” is the pivotal question Daniel Rodriguez poses at the beginning of his recent book. He addresses this issue in a format that is informational, investigative, instructional, and inspirational. The book’s subtitle describes the main focus of his book.

The author begins by addressing the historical and demographic trends of Hispanics in the United States. He documents his conclusions with reliable statistics and presents effective Hispanic evangelical congregational models.

This book is challenging reading on several levels. First, Rodriguez presents the challenge for reaching the current and future generations of Hispanics. Second, he addresses the challenge of language and worship style in Hispanic ministry. The author provides an excellent presentation on the missional focus within the Hispanic context. Finally, he clearly addresses from a scriptural perspective the critical balance of the evangelical (salvation) focus and compassion ministry (social services) within the congregational setting.

Rodriguez validates his presentation with documented congregational testimonies and supportive quotes from published leaders, including numerous Hispanic church leaders, theologians, and research writers. Most of the church models cited in the book are large church/megachurch models. This affirms the growth potential of healthy congregations impacting their Hispanic community beyond the first generation. Yet, the other side of this issue reflects the reality that pastors/leaders must understand this issue before the multilingual, multigenerational Hispanic congregation model becomes effective ministry.

*A Future for the Latino Church* is must reading for Hispanic church leaders and pastors. It provides a solid basis for consideration of a new ministry paradigm that is transformational in implementation and effectiveness of ministry. I highly recommend this book to non-Hispanic pastors/church leaders desiring to begin or sponsor a vibrant Hispanic ministry within their congregation or in their community.

— Reviewed by Efraim Espinoza, director, Office of Hispanic Relations for The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri.



adoptions understood by Christians. The first is human adoption that the Moores experienced. He provides information that encourages those who have adopted and also motivates those who have not considered this venture.

The second adoption is being adopted into the body of Christ. The correlation is amazing. The author holds nothing back in writing of the price Jesus paid for our adoption, and how in doing so, He put to rest forever the question of whether we are brothers or sisters. In the body of Christ we are one in family.

You know an author is on to something when he titles two of his chapters, "Joseph of Nazareth vs. Planned Parenthood" and "Jim Crow in the Church Nursery." This author then ventures into Hillary Clinton terminology in the chapter, "It Takes a Village to Adopt a Child."

I recommend this book to anyone considering adoption or investing in the lives of those who want to adopt. As well, I encourage those who have not found a spiritual family to read and consider the claims of the Bible in bonding them into the family of God as they give their heart to Him.

— Reviewed by Dick Hardy,  
founder, The Hardy Group, Springfield, Missouri.

## The Trinity, Practically Speaking

FRANK D. MACCHIA (*Biblica*, 181 pp., paperback)

Despite the resurgence of Trinitarian theology, many Christians still talk about God and salvation as though the Trinitarian doctrine did not exist. A number of Christians even question its truth value (one-fifth of the Pentecostal Movement — the Oneness Pentecostals — rejects this doctrine).

Richly substantial but written in plain language, Frank D. Macchia's book on the Trinity is the best solution to this negative trend. Macchia, a leading Pentecostal theologian, has served on the cutting edge of conversations with those who reject the doctrine of the Trinity.

Writing from this experience, Macchia uniquely focuses on the scriptural necessity of the Trinitarian doctrine as well as its practical value in enriching our understanding of the Christian life. Since Scripture restricts salvation to God alone (e.g. Hosea 13:4), the biblical picture of salvation as coming from an interactive work of Father, Son, and Spirit necessitates viewing the divine life as shared equally among these three.

Salvation in this light is not just forgiveness of

sins but also a rich participation in the communion of the Triune God. Macchia brings readers to these conclusions through a fascinating journey filled with scriptural support.

This book could provide the basis for a series of lectures or sermons on the Trinity. Each chapter has helpful study questions, making it useful for classroom settings in churches or colleges.

— Reviewed by John Sim, D.Min.,  
associate registrar and adjunct professor of biblical studies,  
Vanguard University, Costa Mesa, California.

## In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology

AMOS YONG (*William B. Eerdmans*, 377 pp., paperback)

Amos Yong's work is suffused with excellent biblical scholarship and the best theological reflection of the Majority World and the West.

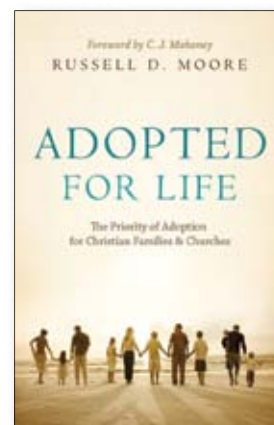
*In the Days of Caesar* is a formative work, suggesting fresh directions for Pentecostals as they assume responsibility for political leadership. Rapid growth compels us to consider political issues while retaining lively hope and evangelistic mission.

Yong surveys historical and contemporary approaches to Christianity and politics. On pages 109–117 he presents his key ideas for Pentecostal engagement. His thesis of "many tongues, many political practices" allows for diverse approaches and the "Five-Fold Gospel" (Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, Baptizer, and Coming King) becomes the formative organizing principle for political engagement. The "last days" are already here with the outpouring of the Spirit and the power of Christ transforms all dimensions of life as the future becomes present.

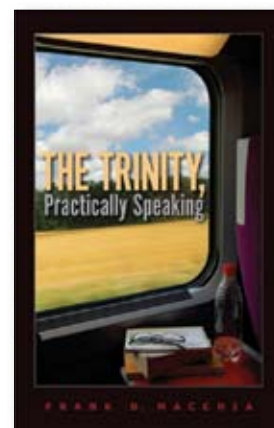
Jesus the Savior releases a politics of worship and spiritual warfare. Jesus the Sanctifier opens us to noncoercive cultural transformation. Jesus the Spirit-baptizer unleashes the prophetic church that works for justice. Jesus the Healer empowers compassion and peacemaking. Jesus the Coming King stimulates environmental stewardship and economic justice.

Though he departs from the traditional dispensationalism, Yong remains thoroughly biblical and Pentecostal and offers ways forward that avoid the narrow thinking of "left" or "right." This is an important book for all leaders.

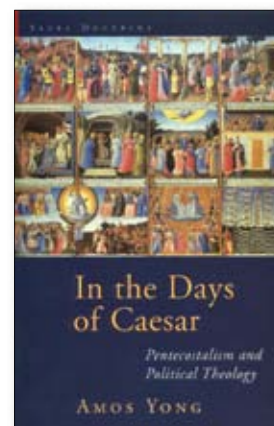
— Reviewed by Charlie Self, Ph.D.,  
associate professor of church history,  
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.



Adopted for Life:  
The Priority of Adoption for  
Christian Families & Churches



The Trinity, Practically Speaking



In the Days of Caesar:  
Pentecostalism and  
Political Theology

## U.S. Missions Celebrates 75 Years



**In 2012, Assemblies of God U.S. Missions will celebrate its 75th anniversary.** U.S. Missions has a rich heritage of ministry and missionaries, dating back to 1937. At the 1937 General Council, Assemblies of God leaders expressed concern that although the fields were ripe for harvest in the United States, the laborers were few. They had the resources to do the work, but believed strengthening churches in the U.S. was the only way to enlarge foreign missions. Assemblies of God leadership created the Home Missions Department and gave it the responsibility to spread the Pentecostal message to all neglected parts of the U.S.

Fred Vogler served as the first director of U.S. Missions, with nine other men following in his footsteps. Today, Zolzie L. Smith, Jr. serves as the executive director of U.S. Missions, which consists of seven windows/ministries: Chaplaincy Ministries; Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, U.S.; Intercultural Ministries; Missionary Church Planters and Developers; U.S. MAPS; Teen Challenge International, U.S.; and Youth Alive. Today, 1,025 missionaries and 565 endorsed chaplains serve under U.S. Missions.

In July 2012, U.S. Missions will host Celebration 75, a conference designed as a time of celebration, fellowship, and prayer for its missionaries.



## New Pentecostal Resources E-newsletter

**The Pentecostal Resources e-newsletter** provides subscribers with the latest information on classic and newer resources. This simple e-newsletter is short on fluff and long on relevance.

Each newsletter features one proven, respected title by a Pentecostal leader from today and yesterday — such as Smith Wigglesworth, Del Tarr, Stanley Horton, Randy Hurst, George O. Wood, and more. You will learn tidbits about each author and a bonus highlight of Pentecostal history.

View a sample e-newsletter and sign up for this exciting, free e-newsletter at [www.gospelpublishing.com/signup](http://www.gospelpublishing.com/signup).

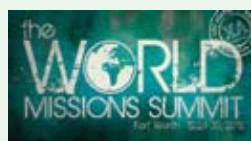
## World Health Sunday

**HealthCare Ministries, Assemblies of God World Missions international medical outreach,** wants to partner with churches to acknowledge the impact that health care providers make in our lives.

HCM has designated April 29, 2012, as World Health Sunday. On this Sunday HCM encourages pastors to acknowledge health care providers in their churches and community.

World Health Sunday also provides pastors opportunity to tell their congregations about HCM projects they can sponsor: RX for Change or MISSION: 20/20. RX for Change encourages people to take an empty pill bottle and fill it with 28 quarters — which equals \$7 — the amount it takes to treat one person on an HCM outreach. MISSION: 20/20 is the optical focus of HCM that collects gently used eyeglasses to give to people on outreaches.

For a packet of resources to assist in celebrating World Health Sunday, visit [www.healthcareministries.org](http://www.healthcareministries.org). Look under the Our Projects tab to find the resources for World Health Sunday. Pastors can also contact HCM at 417-866-6311, or e-mail: [whs@healthcareministries.org](mailto:whs@healthcareministries.org).



## 2012 World Missions Summit III

**World Missions Summit III** will be held Dec. 28–30, 2012, in Fort Worth, Texas.

As in past events, Assemblies of God World Missions will partner with Chi Alpha to challenge young adults to give a year and pray about a lifetime of missionary service. “The Summit has grown in importance for 18–30-year-olds, and we anticipate an even larger number of participants for Summit III,” says David Lee, director of AGWM U.S. Relations and conference organizer.

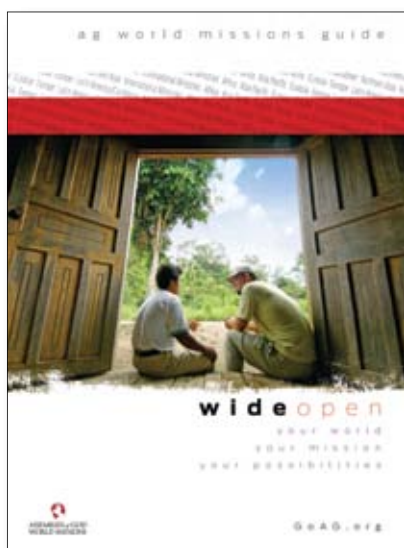
Each region — Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Eurasia, and Northern Asia, along with International Ministries — will use visual and media presentations, interactive cultural exhibits, and music, to present the need to win the lost for Christ. Mealtimes will focus on establishing relationships with AGWM leaders and missionaries. “The Summit is reality missions,” says Lee. “Young adults hear, see, and experience missions in events, exhibits, and interactive breakouts.”

Chi Alpha leaders at Sam Houston State in Huntsville, Texas, report that past Summits influenced 11 full-time missionaries and several missionary associates from their Chi Alpha group to serve in missions. At the Feb. 2010 World Pentecostal Congress in Chennai, India, several missionaries told E. Scott Martin, Chi Alpha director of student missions and conference organizer, “The World Missions Summit confirmed my call to missions.”

The Summit will include “Gatherings” for all participants with worship, special presentations, and missions speakers. Morning and afternoon “Windows to the World” will introduce young adults to the variety of missions opportunities and give them insight into cross-cultural living.

God has used the Summit to change lives. After attending a 2008-09 “Window to the World” session highlighting Europe, a student said, “I had no idea that only 3 percent of Europe’s population claims to be Christian.”

After the Summit, another young adult said, “I have attended church all my life, but this was different. I have been changed.”



**New Guide Offers Missions Opportunities**  
**The Assemblies of God World Missions Personnel and Family Life Department**, the official placement service of AGWM, helps individuals fulfill God's call to missions. Through the Wide Open Missions Guide, individuals can explore a variety of missions opportunities and how to start down the path that is right for them.

In recent years, Assemblies of God World Missions has experienced accelerated growth in short-term and full-time missions. The Wide Open Missions Guide explains the wide variety of opportunities available for service throughout the world. This publication provides specifics concerning how missions service may be possible — whether for a few months, a year, or a lifetime.

Wide Open Missions Guide is free for individuals, churches, and districts. Request the Guide through AGWM Resources or download it at [www.GoAG.org](http://www.GoAG.org).

## Faith Case: The Beatitudes

Gospel Publishing House introduces the newest installment in the *Faith Case* series, *Faith Case: The Beatitudes*. Like its predecessors, *Faith Case: Investigating the Truth* and *Faith Case: Fruit of the Spirit*, the new theme is part of an overall strategy by the Assemblies of God executive leadership team to emphasize Pentecostal truths throughout the Fellowship.

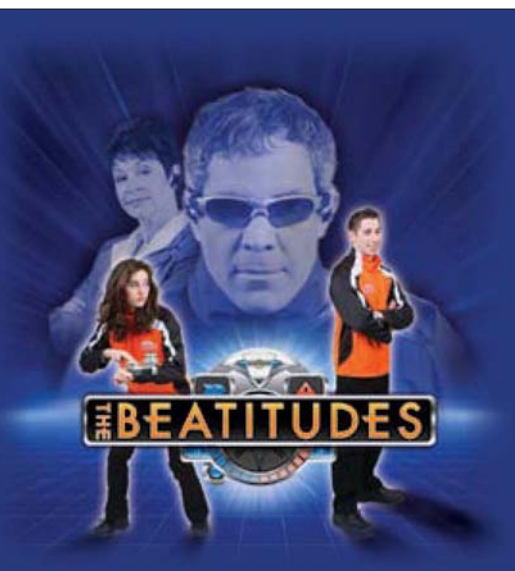
The Faith Case curriculum's goal is to intentionally pass on Pentecostal doctrine and experience to children (ages 5-12) and strategically help churches achieve that goal. "Faith Case is not only entertaining, but it's also helping children embrace their beliefs," says Ken Peckett, marketing director for Gospel Publishing House.

The latest in this DVD-driven children's church curriculum features new characters: Super Agent Man SAM, and cadets Aliyana and Riley. These investigators-in-training, along with the help of SAM and the Commissioner, learn what living for God really looks like. Nine sessions include the following topics: Living for God, Asking for Help, Admitting My Sin, Letting God Control Me, Doing What's Right, and four others. Video clips, object lessons, and games help tie lessons together. Moreover, lessons only require that one person lead, making Faith Case a practical tool for small churches.

Rod Loy, senior pastor of First Assembly of God, North Little Rock, Ark., led development of the first two Faith Case releases and was again tagged as project leader for *Faith Case: The Beatitudes*. Mark Entzminger, senior director of AG Children's Ministries, and Scott Berkey, national director of Children's Ministries Agency, also contributed, as well as other children's pastors, designers, and creative writers.

*Faith Case: The Beatitudes* is perhaps the most life-changing *Faith Case* installment to date. Jake, at Journey Church in Butte, Montana, agrees. "Faith Case is probably the best kids' church curriculum I have come across," he says.

To learn more about all Faith Case releases, visit [www.FaithCase.com](http://www.FaithCase.com).



## Center for Pentecostal Preaching

**Proclaiming the gospel is at the core of the ministry of the church.** The Center for Pentecostal Preaching is working to build on the quality of ministerial preparation provided by Central Bible College by establishing a preaching resource library where students may target their studies in gospel proclamation. The Center is also planning for state-of-the-art preaching laboratories and practice rooms where students may grow in their calling to preach.

In addition, the Center for Pentecostal Preaching comes alongside pastors, missionaries, preachers, Christian workers, and churches to provide services and resources that will enable them to grow in their calling to proclaim biblical messages that are contextually relevant. This will help churches and parachurch ministries around the world more fully realize the expected outcomes of preaching — conversion, Christian growth, and Christian community.

Resources available to preachers, churches, and districts through the Center are:

**Student Preachers:** Area churches may contact the Center to request pulpit supply from a preselected group of students who have demonstrated faithfulness and competency in proclaiming God's Word.

**Sermon Coaching:** Preachers may contact the center to consult with faculty who can provide assistance with various aspects of sermon preparation and delivery.

**Preacher Training:** Seminars and workshops conducted in a church or district will provide opportunities for persons from all backgrounds to receive guided instruction in sermon preparation and delivery.

For more information, contact the Center for Pentecostal Preaching by e-mail: [preaching@cbcag.edu](mailto:preaching@cbcag.edu), or phone 800-831-4222.





### **CBC Offers Media Ministry Degree**

**Central Bible College offers a highly technical associate's degree seen only at a few colleges and universities in the U.S.** The media ministry degree is solidly academic and provides students with the technical knowledge necessary to service churches and organizations in today's highly digital environment. Churches that recognize the value of high-quality video production, electronic advertising, Web media, and graphic design are hiring full-time media pastors. Senior pastors also expect graduates in other ministry areas to have some media knowledge.

In a state-of-the-art Mac lab, the core curriculum in this program is comprised of 42 hours on Adobe Video Production Suite, Final Cut Pro, Photo Shop, Adobe Creative Suite, Web Media and Podcasting, and Media Scriptwriting hours. Numerous hands-on opportunities are available for students to create and produce media works and projects.

For more information about this program, contact Ms. Glenda Mohr at [gmohr@cbcag.edu](mailto:gmohr@cbcag.edu) or Dr. Bonnie Jenkins at [bjenkins@cbcag.edu](mailto:bjenkins@cbcag.edu).



### **CBC Offers Biblical Archaeology Program**

**A team from Central Bible College returned to Israel in July 2011 for its second excavation at Tell es-Safi (Gath).** The city of Gath was a prominent Philistine city, best known as the home of Goliath. King David also went there on at least two occasions, and was a mercenary under Achish, king of Gath.

The CBC team excavated in areas contemporary with the time of the Judges. Some of the noteworthy finds from past seasons include an incised pottery shard believed to represent the name of Goliath, and a temple with two central pillars, reminiscent of the story of Samson.



2011. The program will offer the course, Archaeology of the New Testament World, in spring 2012. CBC has the opportunity to be at the forefront of theological institutions entering the field of biblical archaeology.

Central Bible College represented a part of only a handful of Christians at the excavation. Most of the 100 participants were Israeli nationals, Jewish students from New York and Brandeis University, and students from several other national and international schools such as UCLA, Penn State, Bar-Ilan University, University of Melbourne, and Sheffield University. The biblical archaeology program at CBC offered its first course, Archaeology of Ancient Israel, in spring



### **CBC Offers Contemporary Worship Leadership Degree**

**The contemporary worship leadership degree at Central Bible College in Springfield, Mo.,** is a popular, highly academic, and growing program that offers hands-on opportunities in song-writing competitions and workshops. Students can be a part of auditioned worship teams used in daily chapel services, as well as worship groups that travel nationally and internationally representing the college.

Course work includes the standard music core curriculum: music theory, music history, and conducting. It also offers specialty courses in worship leadership, music in world cultures, keyboard in worship, guitar in worship, biblical principles in contemporary worship, and song writing and arranging.

For more information regarding this degree, contact Dr. Bonnie Jenkins at [bjenkins@cbcag.edu](mailto:bjenkins@cbcag.edu).

## Free *Living in the Spirit* Posters

Tap Into The Holy Spirit's Power For Your Life



### Do you

- desire to experience God more fully every day?
- need more power to help you obey God and overcome sinful habits?
- desire to share your faith boldly, without fear?
- want to passionately love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?
- have questions or feel unsure about the Holy Spirit?

You belong in the exciting new *Living in the Spirit* series. Join us as we get to know the Holy Spirit and invite Him to empower us as individuals and as a church. This 8-week churchwide journey offers

- Kids' Sessions (K-6<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Discussion Series (Teens and adults)
- Teaching Series (Adults)

AG

Date:

Time:

Contact:

Location:

**Churches hosting the *Living in the Spirit* study have a free tool at their fingertips — downloadable posters.** These materials are designed to ignite interest among youth and adults in the weeks before and during the Bible study.

Pastor Toby Quirk, Pioneer Valley Assembly of God, Huntington, Mass., was pleased with his church's eager response to *Living in the Spirit* last year. His church launched the study in early January.

"We have always been a Pentecostal church," Quirk explained, "but this 9-week study stirred up the gifts, and people became more bold for the Lord in whatever context they were in, whether work, school, or home."

"Our study added new life to Sunday morning services in terms of worship and the Word. People still talk about what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives."

Free posters are available at [www.LivingInTheSpirit.ag.org](http://www.LivingInTheSpirit.ag.org). Postcards and flyers are also available as free downloads.

The *Living in the Spirit* Kit is based on the book *Living in the Spirit* by General Superintendent George O. Wood.



MARCH 8-10, 2012 DALLAS, TEXAS

## 2012 National Men's Ministries Leadership Conference

Assemblies of God Men's Ministries National Leadership Conference will be held March 8-10, 2012, in Dallas, Texas. The purpose of this event is to equip the church with tools to custom design a ministry to men.

This conference offers pastors, men's leaders, and laymen opportunity to network with other like-minded leaders and learn from some of the most prominent speakers to men. Thought-provoking sessions will challenge the way the church looks at men's ministries.

Featured speakers include Michael Jr., David Murrow, Neil Kennedy, Choco De Jesus, Ron Maddux, Alton Garrison, Doug Clay, and Tom Greene.

For more information, visit the <http://men.ag.org/>, call 1-800-988-0292, or e-mail [men@ag.org](mailto:men@ag.org).



## U.S. Missions Candidate Orientation

**Just as Jesus commissioned early Christians to reach out to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the four corners of the earth,** U.S. Missions is dedicated to reaching America for Christ. Today we embrace the same commission.

U.S. Missions hosts two orientation sessions each year for new missionary candidates who share this same missionary vision. Candidate orientation consists of interviews, training, evaluation, and preparing candidates for the emotionally and spiritually trying aspects of missions work. The week concludes with a commissioning service. For more information, contact Paul Curtis at 417-862-2781, ext. 3269.

### 2012 Candidate Orientation Dates

Spring orientation: Mar. 17-23, 2012

Application deadline: Dec. 5, 2011

Fall orientation: Sept. 22-28, 2012

Application deadline: June 11, 2012

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IN CLOSING

# THE IRRITATING WORD OF GOD

► BY **GEORGE PAUL WOOD**

**S**everal years ago I spoke to a nighttime gathering of GenXers at the church I attended about a Christian's moral duty to help the poor. Afterward, a few members of the audience thanked me for my words, which they said challenged their preoccupation with selfishness, material acquisition, and lack of generosity. I patted myself on the back for a job well done.

Then I saw a young man wearing thick glasses and hearing aids. His name was David. His clothes were damp from the rain. He smelled like he had not showered in a few days, and he carried all his possessions in a large, plastic trash bag. He told me he was homeless and needed food and shelter for the night. He also asked me if I could help him purchase a bus ticket from Southern California to his hometown in Arizona.

My then-girlfriend and I had plans to attend a friend's birthday party immediately following the service. David's request put a kink in those plans. Although I had once served on the pastoral staff at this church, I no longer did. Consequently, I did not have a church credit card or access to the cash in the benevolence drawer. And I could not find any current staff members to hand off David to. They had all left to go to the same party.

David's request irritated me. I felt he was imposing on me. The absence of pastoral staff irritated me. I felt they were abdicating their responsibilities. The realization that I would be late to the party irritated me. I could tell it was going to take a bit of time to square David away.

Most of all, however, the Word of God irritated me. It is one thing to preach a Christian's moral duty to help the poor, as I had just done so eloquently and successfully. It is entirely another thing to practice that duty, as I was failing to do so miserably. The Word irritated me because it exposed my hypocrisy.

James 1:19–27 warns us about disconnecting hearing God's Word from heeding it. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves," James writes.

"Do what it says" (verse 22). James then describes the specific actions Word-hearers and Word-heeders should perform: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (verse 27).

Paul has a similar perspective on widows. In 1 Timothy 5:3–16, he writes, "[Christian family members] should learn first to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family" (verse 4). He adds: "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (verse 8). If widows have no one to care for them, the church is supposed to care for them. "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need," he writes (verse 3).

John also draws a tight connection between religion and helping the poor in 1 John 3:17: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"

How indeed? Once I realized that God wanted me to help David, I took him to the birthday party (with my girlfriend's and friend's okay). I invited him to sleep on the foldout couch at my apartment and helped him wash and dry his clothes. I fed him the next morning and found a friend who could cover his bus fare home. By heeding God's Word, I met David's need and came to understand, experientially, the meaning of God's love.

If the Word of God irritates your conscience, do what it says. You will find that it also soothes. 🙏

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**GEORGE PAUL WOOD** is executive editor of *Enrichment* journal, and director of Ministerial Resourcing, Springfield, Missouri.